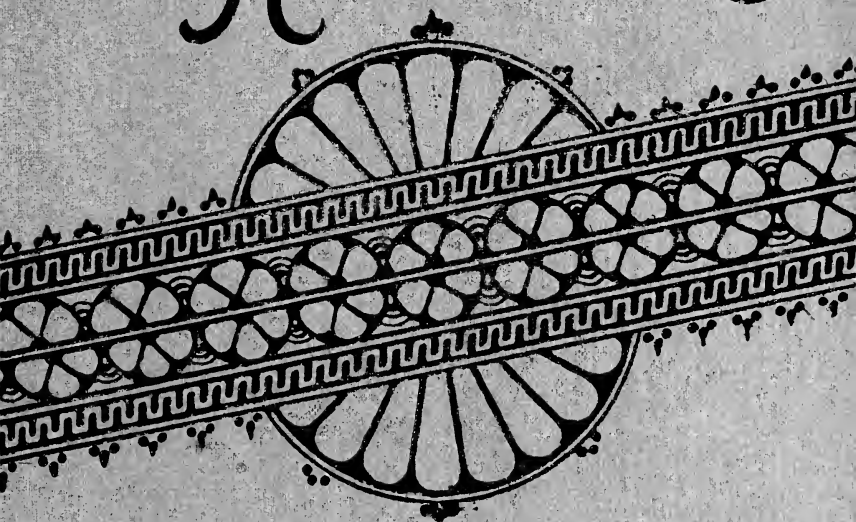


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BY

J. E. PANTON.



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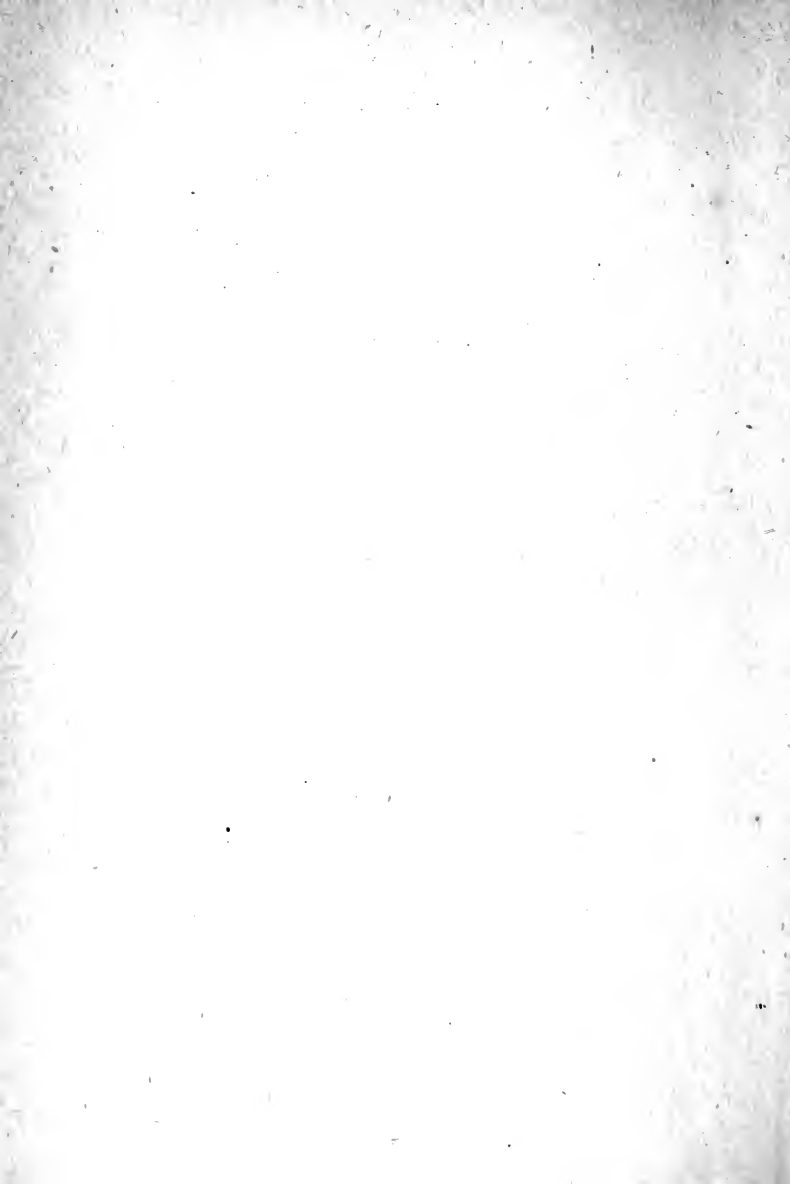
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HAVING AND HOLDING.



# HAVING AND HOLDING;

A Story of Country Life.

*IN THREE VOLUMES.*

BY

J. E. PANTON,

AUTHOR OF

"FROM KITCHEN TO GARRET," "THE CURATE'S WIFE,"  
ETC., ETC.

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VOLUME II

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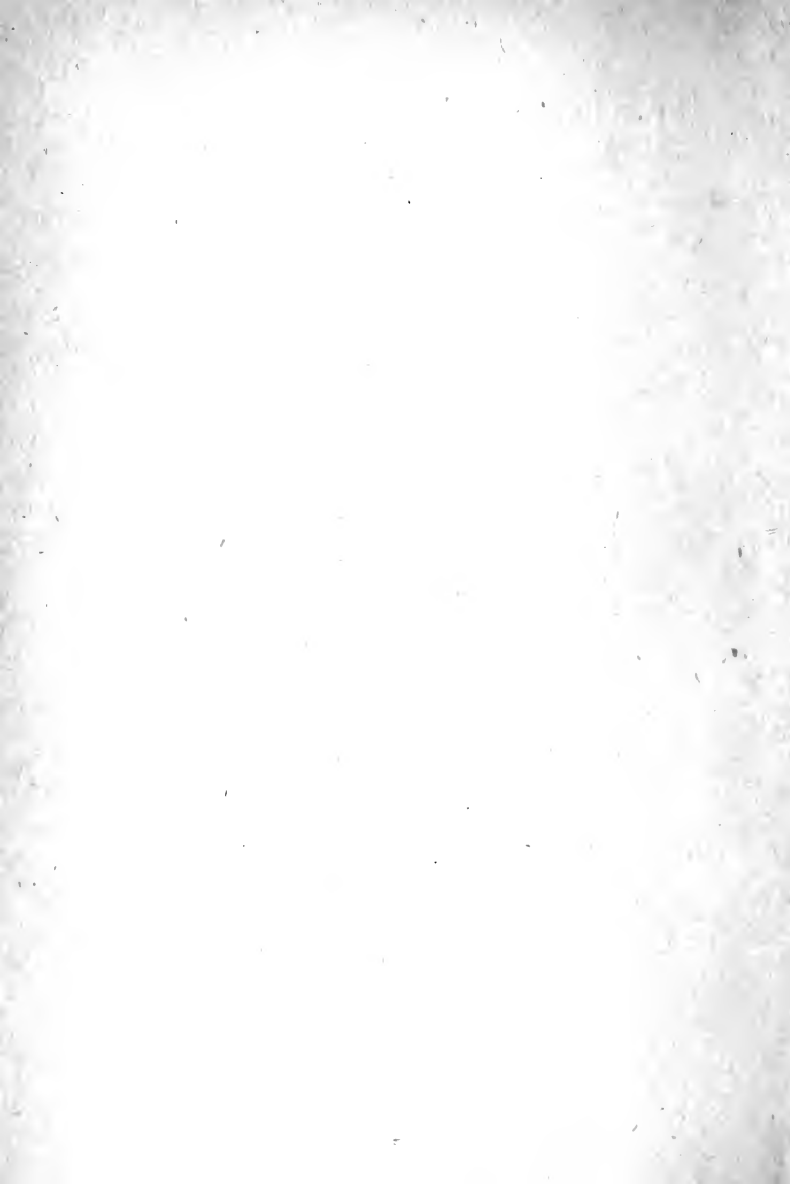
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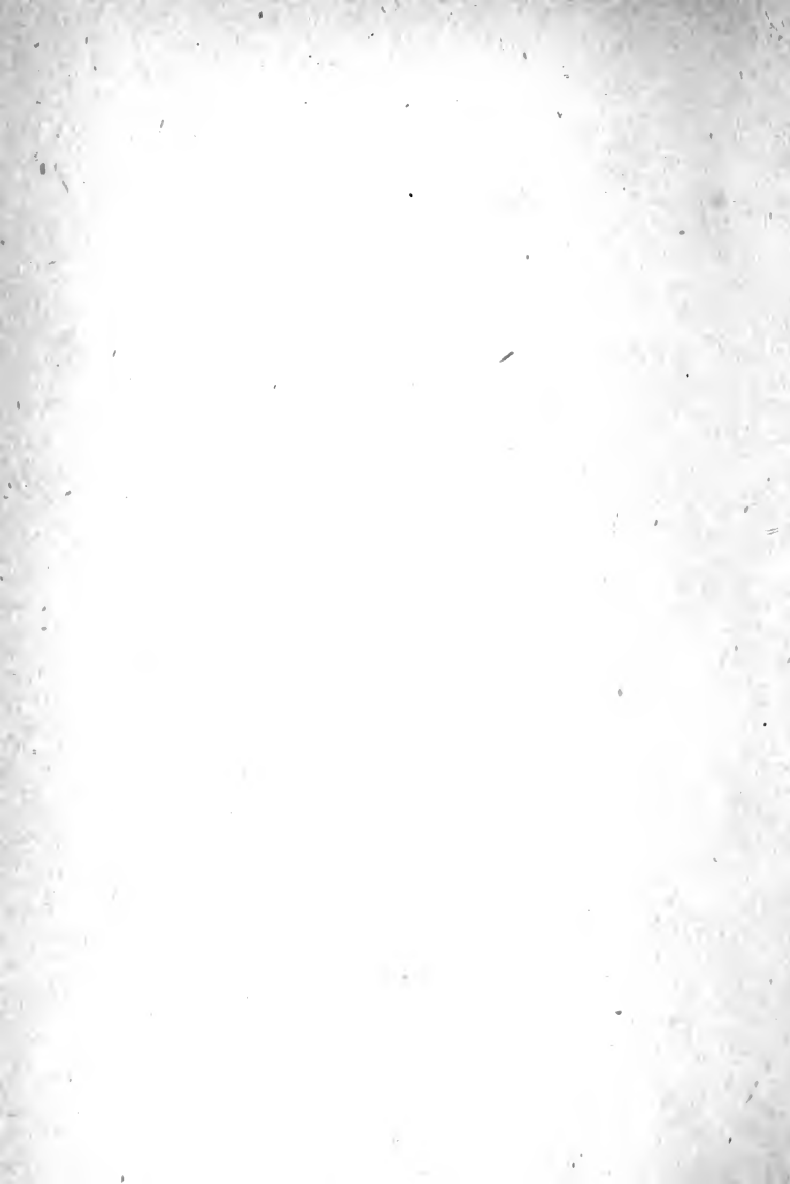


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*TO B. S.,*  
*IN MEMORY OF MANY TRAMPS AMONG*  
*THE FULBROOK HILLS.*



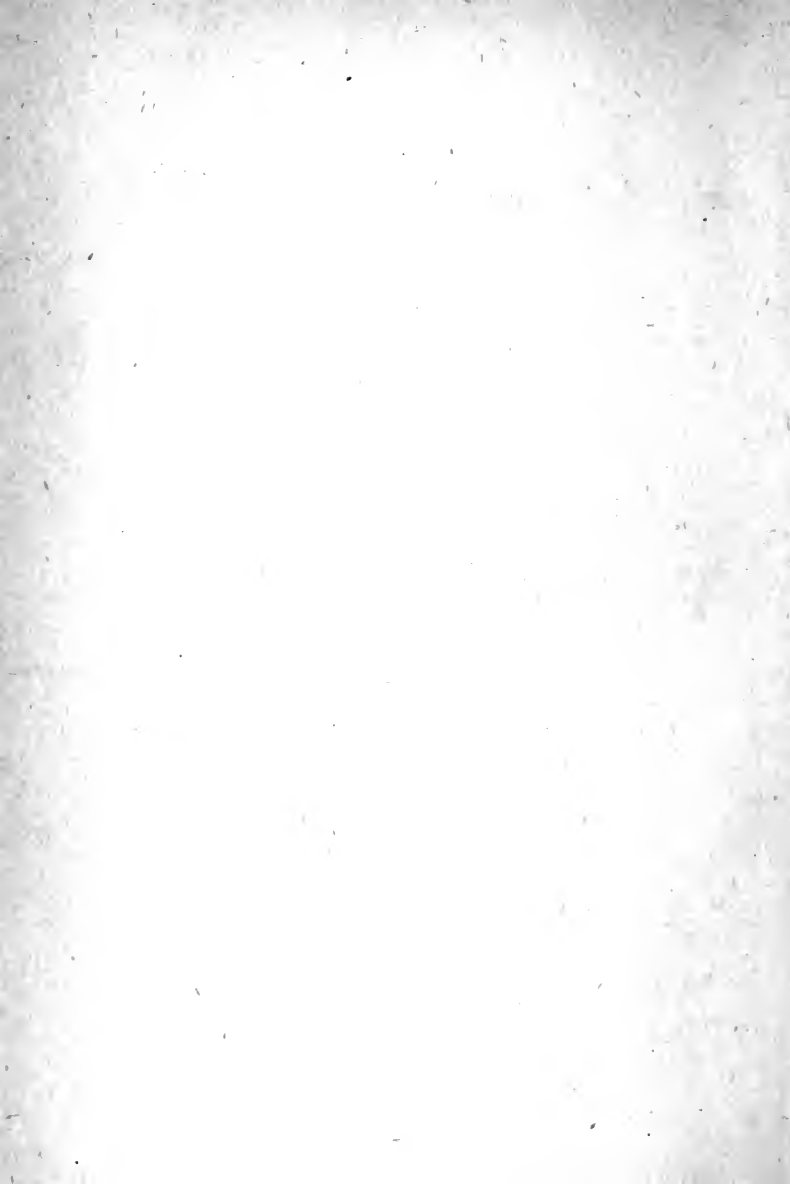
# CONTENTS.

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## VOLUME II.

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CHAP.	PAGE
I. HOW THE POLL WAS DECLARED . . . . .	9
II. AT STRADFIELD . . . . .	40
III. "SO THEY WERE MARRIED" . . . . .	71
IV. AT WINDYHOLME . . . . .	102
V. A FIRST SEASON . . . . .	133
VI. A MEETING OF THE SYMPOSIUM . . . . .	165
VII. LORD WILLIAM'S BILL . . . . .	194
VIII. LADY WILLIAM'S BILLS . . . . .	221



# HAVING AND HOLDING;

*A STORY OF COUNTRY LIFE.*

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## CHAPTER I.

HOW THE POLL WAS DECLARED.

THE moment the writ was issued, the excitement in Barford rose to fever height, and each side vied with the other in their efforts to ensure success for their several candidates. Notwithstanding the ballot act, threats were freely exercised, and Lord William was driven almost mad by his new supporters, who, regardless of the consequences of such conduct, promised and swore such things in his name as he had no idea of, and pledged him to support measures that were as poison to him, until he felt that there was not a pin to choose between his tactics

and those repressive and reprehensible ones which he fondly hoped he could restrict to the opposite side, and which he had never been tired of denouncing vigorously.

But what could he, a comparative stranger in the town and neighbourhood, do against those who held all the strings in their own hands, and who did not scruple to use every atom of help they could obtain, no matter what such help meant, so long as it led to success at last ?

He might, and did, strenuously object to the support of the men by the wharf-side, who lived on eel-spearing and poaching, and who were shrewdly suspected of stealing everything on which they lay their hands ; but they had votes ; swore by Bodgers, and were retained on his side, no matter what politics he represented for the moment ; and he might and did protest against the assistance of those who voted to satisfy Bodgers' claim for rent or hush money, rather than because they cared either for the country as a whole, or their own town ; but all his protests were

as naught, and he writhed constantly under the sting of the old Squire's tongue; the while he wondered if once in the House he could ever use his hardly-bought experience to bring about a more healthy manner of returning Members than exists now, even under the most strenuous of bribery acts.

"I don't feel sometimes as if I can carry the matter through even now," he exclaimed to Jacinth, the evening after the nomination in Barford. "I am quite certain that nothing will ever make me feel honest and independent again. We laughed at Talbot's agonies on the Cross, when he had to shake hands with the farmers and manure and corn merchants every market day, but they are nothing to what I suffer every time I meet that little scoundrel Bodgers; and the women really are worse. Did you see the procession Mrs. Bodgers got up in my honour? Oh! Jacinth, when I came across that boat on wheels manned by all the riffraff from the harbour, and dragged by the scum of the town, and noticed Mrs. Bodgers in a species of naval costume, with

her bull-dog following her, clad like its mistress in any amount of pink ribands, I felt as if nothing could compensate for having such people on our side ; and Mrs. Salway is worse, she harangued the crowd out of the 'Lion' window for quite five minutes, and has promised to do the same kind service for me after the declaration of the poll ; it really makes me ashamed to be the cause of such unfeminine behaviour."

"You're the wrong side, you see," replied Jacinth quietly, "the women of our party don't disgrace themselves in public, anyhow. I haven't been into Barford for at least a week ; and neither I nor Barbara intend going there until all the fuss is over."

"And then you'll drive through to Windyholme," said Lord William, taking her hand and drawing her towards him.

"No, not until your people have been consulted and have given their official sanction to our marriage," answered Jacinth. "I enter no family where I am not wanted ; but we have settled to leave all in abeyance," she



added, seeing Lord William was about to become demonstrative, "until after the election Mr. Wylliams is quite capable of turning round again at the last moment and upsetting the whole affair."

"Which you would like, eh, Jacinth? as I am on the wrong side," asked her *fiancé*, smiling. "I wonder you do not declare our engagement at once and so blight my hopes of future distinction in the House."

"Because I am most anxious you should distinguish yourself there," said she, laughing, "and because I know quite well that once there, you will be so disgusted with all your allies: the Irish for example, to say nothing of many more of the Radical Members: that you will return to the fold quietly and become respectable once more. It is only a question of time with you, I know. 'Down with h'everythink,' is the cry of youth; in middle age we all become truly anxious to conserve everything we can; we only become conscious then of the worth of what we possess, and are aware that reform is a chimera, and generally

inaugurated by those who see no beauty in age; and who, possessing nothing themselves, are only anxious to get hold of what others have—these are true Liberal principles.”

“You are Conservative to the back bone, and no mistake,” said Lord William, smiling despite himself at his lady love’s creed; “and you must forgive me if I attempt to convert you by saying that Conservative principles are to grab all one can and hold on to it, despite the starvation and suffering one sees around one; to steal the land, to add field to field and park to park, despite the fact that one’s poor brother has not space enough to breathe or to grow so much as a potato; but you will never make me a Conservative, Jacinth, any more than the profoundest and most eloquent demagogue that ever existed will make me vote for either the disendowment of the Church, the deceased wife’s sister bill, or women-suffrage: three distinct and emphatic portions of the Liberal creed, I know; but for neither one of which will I vote. I can’t see that because I enter

Parliament I am at once to sink my identity and become a mere follower of one leader. I vote for a thing because it is a good thing, and not because it emanates from either side of the House. Let the Conservatives free the land, give Ireland justice and home rule, and throw open the museums on Sundays, and I should help them all I can ; but politics have become mere matters of party and office, and there are few honest men left to legislate for us. With the best of them it's all a matter of office, and the way votes are given and elections managed make one almost wild. One would have thought Barford far enough from the madding crowd to retain some of its pristine simplicity ; but, alas ! it is as corrupt a little place as I ever knew."

"That's Bodgers, your man, you know," replied Jacinth, easily.

"Your man the week before last," answered Lord William ; "but, thank goodness, the day after to-morrow all will be over, and I trust that by the time another election comes off we shall have brought in a bill that will render

personal canvass of any sort or kind penal, and that will allow of men being taught that their vote is a proud possession of their manhood, and not a negotiable article worth so much, either commercially or socially; a lesson they will never learn as long as they are liable to be coerced or canvassed by a duchess, or driven to the poll in a coronetted carriage."

"Or in the 'Bear' omnibus," said Jacinth, laughing, as she remembered that this homely vehicle had been annexed by the agent for Lord William's voters.

"You are right; both sides are bad alike," replied Lord William, with a sigh. "But thanks to those who have had the ordering of matters, the polling stations are so awkwardly placed that my poor clay-pit fellows would have to walk six miles if they were not driven, and that after their work. But I won't talk any more about electioneering matters, Jacinth. Wednesday will decide all, and after that I shall write to my mother. She is sure to be delighted, dearest."

“You remember my father?” said Jacinth, in a low voice. “She may resent your bringing the daughter of a suicide and a swindler into the family.”

“She will remember nothing but your mother and brother, and that your father was not courageous,” said Lord William. “Jacinth, won’t you do him tardy justice? Bob—dear old fellow—has told me all, and I know he shot himself because he could not bear to see his children in want and unhappy. Do be merciful to him and forget. I do hope your future will be so bright that you may never think about the past. Still, we are all liable to fall, and some day you, too, may require forgiveness.”

“That is not likely,” exclaimed Jacinth, raising her head proudly. “I am no fool to plunge recklessly into sin and dishonour, as he did.”

“Piece by piece, morsel by morsel, step by step,” said Lord William, seriously; “no one plunges headlong into sin, dear. You may depend upon it, the history of crime is a

mere matter of small things. The thief begins by meaning to restore ; the forger only means to borrow his friend's name. We are all too hard upon sinners ; we who have never been tempted nor really tried, and, though we forgive from a high standpoint, refuse to forget really. Forgiveness, to be real, should include forgetfulness. Half the sinners this world contains continue sinners because they know though they may be forgiven, their crime can never be forgotten, and will stand like a wall between them and their fellow-creatures for ever. I do hope if anyone ever sins against me I shall be able to prove my theory, and show forgetfulness as well as forgiveness to them. But don't let us talk of such matters, dear. The moment the poll is declared, that moment I write to my mother and tell her all ; and now it is getting late, and I have to drive over to the Manor. I am going to stay there until after Wednesday. By the way, you and your people are dining there that night, are you not ?”

“ Isn't it disgusting ?” asked Jacinth, with

a shudder. "Yes, we are, all of us. Old Powell came over and insisted on Bob's going, as he knew we should like to hear the result of the poll, which will be declared about ten o'clock. He is to station what he calls a 'mounted 'orseman' in Barford, and we are to hear the news at once. I wonder he didn't put up a private wire for the occasion."

"Poor old Powell," laughed Lord William. "If it wasn't so late, Jacinth, I should give you another lecture, for he has remained staunch to his early creed in the teeth of his women-folk, and to the serious detriment of his social standing. It requires the fortitude and moral courage of a hero to remain a Dissenter and a Radical in such a country place as Barford; and that good old fellow sticks to his principles through all. Every time I see his horses stop at 'Beulah' I mentally take off my hat to him, for I question much if I should do the same under similar circumstances, and I honour him more than I can say; but good-night, dear one;

after Wednesday there will be no need of secrecy, and I shall be able to say good-night properly," and so saying Lord William pressed Jacinth's hands warmly in his, being far too conscious of the all pervading eyes of the Vicarage servants, to take such a farewell as could be allowed to engaged lovers; while Jacinth, anxious to read a long letter received from Francis Seymour, and extremely tired of the election and all appertaining to it, said good-night hurriedly, and ran up to her room, thankful that at last she could be herself, and need not feign an interest she did not feel.

Even after such an extremely short engagement as hers, Jacinth confessed to herself that she was profoundly bored by her lover. Imperious and emphatically coercive as was her character, she had no sympathy with Lord William's plans or political faith; and as her own end and aim in life was to emancipate herself from poverty and Bevercombe, and throw herself heartily into all kinds of amusements and pleasures; she began to doubt whether, after all, she was



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wise to accept and bind herself to a man, whose heart and head were full of schemes for his fellow creatures; and who took far more interest in the designs and furniture of his convalescent homes on the Fulbrook moors than he did in any scheme for the beautifying of Windyholme; which at present Jacinth had not seen, but which she had heard spoken of as the worst kept and dreariest mansion in all that dreary and ill-managed district. But, strong in her belief in herself, and knowing that she exercised an immense and powerful influence over her lover, Jacinth believed that she had but to speak to have all she wanted; and, feeling convinced that she would never again have such a chance of emancipation as that now offered her, she opened Francis Seymour's letter with a sigh, and devoured the brilliant pages, putting it aside with a deeper sigh at last, as she sank into a chair and thought over the joyous Bohemian existence that might have been hers had she married her first love, and so been able to plunge deeply

into a life where every moment was full of excitement, and where no one bothered their heads in the least about their fellow creatures, save and except when their doings and sayings formed a nucleus for a specially spicey article, or suggestive and clever "par" in their several papers.

And all this was over. As Lady William Petersfield, she could never hope to be one of the merry company she fancied must always be as happy and "devil-may-carish" as Mr. Seymour invariably represented it to be; and feeling dissatisfied and miserable, Jacinth went to bed, to dream of being weighed down by the sober dullness of her new possessions and position, the while she gazed enviously out of a barred window at a crew of revellers, who taunted her ever and anon with her imprisonment and their absolute freedom.

However, there were few traces of misery or disappointment on Jacinth's face when she and Barbara entered the Powells' ugly drawing room, on the evening of the day on

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which the election had been fought and won, followed by Bob, who sedulously refused to lead in his wife arm-in-arm in the curious manner that was considered *the* way to enter a Barford or Fulbrook drawing-room ; for rarely, if ever, had she looked so beautiful as she did then. Bob had brought back the news that in all certainty the poll must be declared in Lord William's favour, and she was already discounting the dignities of her new position, being sure whichever way the day went, that at all events her engagement would soon be public property. And as she swept into the room, in a beautiful soft Indian muslin, and broad yellow sash, procured on the strength of her engagement from her old London dressmaker ; who was so fond of her that she would have given her the garment if she would have accepted it from her ; and who was doubly anxious to please the future daughter-in-law of a duke ; she might have been the Duchess herself, though duchesses are, as a rule, rather more conspicuous for their way-worn and travel-stained raiment,

than for dresses such as proclaim their rank to an outside world.

The Powell girls and Mrs. Powell looked at Jacinth's gown with amazement, knowing quite well that it bore the stamp of a past mistress in the art of clothing the human body, and the Misses Powells' faces flushed as pink as their sashes when they noticed the yellow colours of the Talbots borne boldly into the hostile camp—colours they would have given half their allowance to be able to sport ; but Mrs. Powell was too good-natured to do more than lift her eyebrows, and Jacinth's dress would have passed unnoticed, had not old Mr. Powell fussed up and begun to compliment her on it, the while he insisted on her wearing the clump of oleanders that had been provided for each of his guests as a badge of the party.

“Lord ! I'm glad it's all over,” he said, as he gave Jacinth her flowers, despite her refusal to wear them, “now we shall all be friends again ; there's no doubt we've won, and we shall all have to congratulate Barford and ourselves on our new Member. I'm sorry

your frock's so thin, Miss Merridew. All the 'orses is 'arnessed, and off we go to the Town Hall in a body the moment my fellow rides over and tells us the poll's declared. Three carriages and six 'orses, and all done lovely with pink ribands; it'll be a sight Barford has never been blessed with before; and the days are so light and bright we shall all be seen. You'll have to leave your yellow sash at 'ome, Miss Jacinth. The girls have a spare pink one, no doubt, they can lend you. I don't stint 'em in ribands, particularly not at election times."

"They're all of a wrong colour, papa," said the eldest Miss Talbot, pertly; "and even if Miss Merridew would change her sash, the yellow riband is all run in and out in her dress under the lace, and so she could not change her colours, even if she wants to."

"Well! never mind, never mind," replied old Powell, good-naturedly; "here comes Lord William; at all events, you must wear his colours in your cheeks, Miss Merridew. Pink's the colour all young ladies start when

they see a young feller, eh! Miss Merridew? and small blame to 'em. I remember when the pink was shown for me," and, chuckling to himself, he waddled across the room to Lord William, who entered the room, the universal oleander in his button-hole, and looking, as he felt, wearied to death. When he could shake off his host he came and sat down by Jacinth, and, touching her sash with his finger, said, lightly :

"A traitor in the camp, Miss Merridew! but a lovely colour all the same. Did you know Squire Wylliams was here? He is to drive in with us to Barford when the poll is declared."

"With you; not with us," replied Jacinth, faintly smiling, "and I am no traitor, Lord William. I am only showing my colours properly."

"And quite right, quite right, damme," chuckled the Squire, who had approached the sofa on which Jacinth was seated unobserved. "A low Radical lot, those pink chaps, eh, Miss Merridew? You'd have nothing to say to 'em, eh?"

“You must remember you are talking of yourself,” replied Jacinth, fluttering her fan. “You, too, wear the mark of the beast,” and she pointed to the oleander in the Squire’s coat.

“All’s fair in love and war, and this is my last appearance in pink,” said the Squire, loud enough to be heard over the room. “Give me a scrap of your riband, Miss Merridew, and I’ll mount it at once. It don’t matter now; the last vote’s given, and I can return easily to your side;” and he stretched out his hand, hoping to receive a morsel of the yellow sash, but, luckily, at this moment dinner was announced, and Jacinth found herself being led into the dining-room by a meek curate from Barford, who, having begun life as a Methodist minister, yet felt bound to remain in the old political camp; though, had Fulbrook asked him to dinner, instead of reminding him at every possible moment of his ancient creed, there is small doubt that he would have at once succumbed to the smiles of the county, and turned as yellow as he had

once been of a roseate hue. But, as the only people who were really kind to him were the Powells, he still remained staunch, and believed fully that nothing on this earth would induce him to change his colours.

As he had absolutely no conversation, and as Jacinth sat between him and the local solicitor, whose chances of a good dinner were too rare to allow of his neglecting it when it came in his way, and so paid attention to nothing save what old Powell persisted in calling the "bill o' fare"—though Mrs. Powell spoke of the "maynoo," and felt that she was all that was Parisian in so doing—Jacinth had nothing to do save consume what she required herself, and meditate on the position in which she was placed, and what was immediately before her; and as beyond the vast shoulders of her opposite neighbour she could see the lovely line of the Fulbrook hills and the beautiful valley in which Barford lay, she troubled herself about nothing else, and calmly awaited the *denouement* of the election—the first hint of the declaration of the poll



being given by the hoisting of the flag on the grey church tower, from whence the delicious peal of the best bells in the south of England was presently wafted towards them on the still July evening air.

It was a time of breathless suspense; for whoever won the flag would be hoisted and the bells would ring, despite political bias, for the Barford Member; and as by the time the news had reached the ringers, the mounted horseman would be half the way to the Manor, the first sound of the bells disorganised the whole company, and even the solicitor paused, with a delicious fragment poised on his fork, and listened anxiously.

Old Mr. Powell threw down his napkin and pushed his chair away from the table.

“Dash it all ! it’s more than flesh and blood can bear !” he exclaimed. “I’m going down the drive, dinner or no dinner. I’ll be the first to know who’s won. Come, yer Lordship, you and me ’ll go and meet the man ;” and so saying, he rushed off, much to Mrs. Powell’s dismay, as she recollected her patiently

designed dinner, and the fearful expense she had gone to, to show Lord William that she could give him as good a dinner as ever he had had in his "ducal'ome." She little knew, poor lady, what those dinners were like; if so, she would not have been half as agitated as she had been, when giving the orders to her faithful cook.

Half the gentlemen ran off with Mr. Powell, and the rest of the company had risen and stood about in little groups; the Squire was watching Miss Merridew over his glasses; and at last she too left the table and went outside into the garden, where Lord William speedily followed her.

"It will soon be over now," he said, in a low whisper, "and then——"

"Hush!" said Jacinth, looking uneasily over her shoulder. "Listen and look! The bells are lovely; and oh! how fair, how beautiful even the barren heath looks under the spell of a July night!" and she pointed to the marvellous lovely hills with a hand that trembled, despite her desire to appear

unaffected by the unusual excitement round her.

But small time was given to them in which to admire the view, as they had scarcely stood a moment in the garden before the dining-room was filled suddenly with what looked like a surging mob; the place rang with shouts, and the guests sprang up on chairs and impulsively waved their dinner-napkins. The hard-working agent sank into Mr. Powell's chair and proceeded to feel faint; and though no one said it, everyone knew that Lord William was in, and in by a majority that had never been the lot of any Conservative Member in the whole annals of the borough; while the fact was accentuated somewhat sharply by Mrs. Salway, who had ridden wildly over on her husband's gig horse, throwing her arms round Lord William and kissing him heartily; an example swiftly followed by Mrs. Bodgers, and that would have been followed by all the women present, had not Miss Powell caught sight of Jacinth's proud, disdainful face, at the very moment she was advancing to the attack, and

in consequence contented herself with warmly shaking the new Member's hand, as if she would never let it go again. A more ludicrous sight than Lord William presented, when submitting to the hearty embraces of his lady canvassers, has never been seen ; and as he was at last released, and was able to ascertain his majority of 682, which in a constituency of little over 2,000 was something marvellous, he looked at Jacinth appealingly, as if to ask her for the congratulations she, out of all that raging host, was the only person to withhold from him.

But Jacinth's very soul was revolting against the whole scene ; the excitement which had turned Mrs. Salway and Mrs. Bodgers into lunatics, and which appeared to have emptied half the Barford slums into old Powell's dining-room, only sickened her. She could not help thinking how differently the Talbots would have received the news of their victory ; and she felt inclined to smile sweetly on the old Squire when he said, "It is a disgusting sight, isn't it, Miss Merridew? Ah! you were quite

right, quite right. There's none of the repose of the caste of Vere de Vere about those women, eh? and now we're off for the Town Hall. Of course you're coming too; it will be a real treat to hear Mrs. Salway address the crowd out of the window, and see Lord William standing between those two outrageous females to be presented to his constituents. You should have heard Mrs. Salway this morning; she began, 'Men of Barford, we're here, and here we intend to stay.' Doubtless the second edition to-night will be well worth hearing. Of course you're coming?" and Mr. Wylliams laughed sardonically as he noticed Miss Merridew's countenance change as Lord William came up to her and began to speak in a low tone of voice, while old Mr. Powell bustled hither and thither, grouping his guests, with an eye to their speedily filling the carriages, which were now coming up the drive.

Mr. Merridew came to his sister at this moment. "Barbara wants to get home now, Jacinth. We should be singularly out of

place in Barford to-night, and I am sure Lord William will excuse us, as he has followers enough and to spare."

"I would not have you go into Barford for untold gold," replied the new Member, emphatically; "more especially as there is every chance of a row. Talbot doesn't take his defeat comfortably, and some of his retainers have been already on the war path; one of those coxey young farmers began it, and he was almost murdered this afternoon; indeed, would have been, had not Mrs. Bodgers tumbled him into her waggonette, covered him with a couple of rugs, and driven him gallantly out of the town. Now I hear he has threatened to return with some other spirits worse than himself, and I dread a free fight now all is over, so I should be glad to know you and Jacinth were safely on your way home to the peaceful vicarage. I rather shrink, too, from the ordeal before us. Mrs. Salway has ready her second edition of the 'Men of Barford,' and I don't want Jacinth

to be more disgusted with the Liberal cause than she is at present."

"That would be impossible," said Jacinth, coldly, raising her head imperiously, and looking her lover straight in the face.

"Dearest, you must allow for the excitement of the moment," he said, eagerly pressing up to her and taking her hand, regardless of the crowd; and he was proceeding to excuse his irrepressible followers, when the Squire pressed up to him and snatched Jacinth's hand from his rudely.

"She's not for you," he said, violently. "You're Member for Barford, please to remember, and this young lady told me she'd rather die than be the wife of a Radical Member. That's why I helped you. Do you think I cared anything for you? No! I only wanted to place a barrier between you that you couldn't overleap, and by George! I've done it," and he grinned sardonically, and looked impudently at Lord William Petersfield.

Both he and Mr. Merridew were at a loss

what to do ; the old Squire's temper and language were too well known not to be feared. The crowd was already attracted by his loud tones, and Lord William was about to stave off the matter, as time pressed and Mr. Powell was waiting for him to join him, when the Squire added, fiercely, " And before you go, let's settle matters, Miss Merridew. I ask you again—straight out before all these people—will you marry me? You'd do well, I assure you ; and all I promised before, I'll fulfil, see if I won't," and once more he pressed up to her, and waited for her answer, all Barford waiting open-mouthed, needless to remark, to catch her words ; but Mr. Merridew exclaimed, " Excuse me, Squire, but my sister is not accustomed to such a curious way of making a proposal ; besides, I may, perhaps, be forgiven if I inform you in her name that she is otherwise engaged, and has been for some little time ; and now we'll go home." And drawing Jacinth's hand inside his arm, he was about to proceed to his carriage, followed by Barbara, when Lord William



stopped him. "One minute," he said. "I think, as people have a habit of talking in Barford, that I may save a good deal of surmise if I introduce to our good friends the future Lady William. I have won my election and my wife, too," and he took Jacinth's hand and drew her forward.

Naturally, the excitement found vent in louder cheers than ever, and Jacinth had to submit to congratulations which she could not help thinking were singularly out of place, and that made her crosser than she was before, and she was haughtily bowing to those who intended to shake her hand violently, when the Squire came up to her with a face as white as his shirt-front.

"Is this true?" he said.

"Quite true," she replied, quietly. "You see, Mr. Wylliams, it is a lady's privilege to change her mind, and when I accepted Lord William I never thought he would be Member for Barford; and now he is I can hardly break my word, can I?" and for the first time that evening Jacinth smiled.

The Squire did not speak. With all his faults—with all his store of bad language—he was a gentleman, and knew when he was beaten. He bowed, stammered a few words, and then stood back and allowed the Merridews to pass out, while Mr. Powell followed them, congratulating Jacinth at the top of his voice. When they had gone, the Squire rang for his carriage violently, and throwing himself into the seat by his man, told him in an audible tone to drive to an extremely warm locality, which the man interpreted to mean driving him home, where he ended the evening by swearing at every member of his household, and by having his portmanteau packed, so that at the first beam of light he might shake off the dust of the whole place, and turn his back on all the nest of vipers.

And the successful Member drove into Barford, and duly made his first speech as Barford's Member, being supported gallantly by Mrs. Salway, whose "Men of Barford" address was duly reported in the county paper at full length by the reporter of the

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opposite faction, and which remains as a proof of to what lengths "those women" went at election times until this day in the annals of the little town; while the unhappy object of her canvass drove home to Windyholme, across the heath, devoutly thankful that the election was over, and that he was free to woo his bride in peace and quiet, and fully resolved that if ever again he stood for Barford he would do so on his own merits, and unassisted by either the Squire or Bodgers, whose last appearance was doubled up under the long table at the "Red Lion," overcome, said his wife, by his arduous exertions; overcome, said mine host, by the vast amount of liquor he had consumed to make those arduous exertions possible.

## CHAPTER II.

## AT STRADFIELD.

THE Duke of Dorset took up his *Morning Post* on the day after the election with an unuttered but very fervent prayer, while the Duchess opened the *Times* on the same occasion with a remarkably shaky hand. A glance at the election intelligence was enough for both of them, and they laid down the papers and gazed at each other across the breakfast table.

"It is dreadful, dear," said the Duchess, after a moment's pause, "and such a majority ; it is enough to shake the Queen on her throne."

"We must make the best of it," replied the Duke, taking up his letters ; "it might have been worse. There are some subjects on which he is staunch, and when William

sees who are his allies I am sure he will come round. You had better send up the *Post* to my mother, Beatrix. She told me she would rather receive the intelligence alone; if it were bad she would bear it better. I can't think where he picked up his ideas; there has not been a Liberal in our family since the Commonwealth, and then the fellow only changed his politics to save his head, and took the earliest possible opportunity of recanting his errors. We must try and get him married, dear, he must want a mistress at Windyholme; and then there'll be the season in town. A good, strong Conservative wife would soon correct him; and we must ask him here—is not Amy de Lisle coming to you soon? She is the very wife for William, and her people are absolutely faultless!”

But before the Duchess could reply, the butler came into the room with a telegram, which he handed to the Duke, who took it gingerly, as if it would bite him, and the Duchess hurriedly counted up her flock, and

wondered if anything had happened to her old father and mother. She had scarcely reassured herself by remembering that all her eight little girls were safe in the nursery and school-room, when the Duke gave vent to an exclamation of surprise. "There's no reply," he said to the butler, who left the room. Then he remarked, "William telegraphs, 'News of importance. Am coming to Stradfield by the 7.30 train. Send to meet me.' News of importance! what can he mean? Does he think we have no papers here, and that we are not aware of his election?"

"You may depend upon it, he is going to be married!" exclaimed his wife. "Someone in or near Barford. Someone dreadful, for no one lives there or in the neighbourhood save those elderly Fulbrook women, and he would never have the sense to take one of them."

The Duke laughed. "There may be a parson's daughter, or even a pretty girl belonging to some farmer," he said, sardonically. "You know William is not very

particular. Well, we were spared 'our Gre-ace,' dear, so let us hope for the best. And ask Amy de Lisle here at once ; her golden head and blue eyes will soon put any one else out of his head. Anyhow, remember, no opposition ; after all, William will please himself, and we don't want to quarrel with him ; he has been a good uncle to the girls, and you know if anything should happen to me they have no one else to look to," but as the very smallest hint of her lord's demise invariably caused the Duchess to dissolve into floods of tears, the Duke hurriedly changed the subject, and took up the telegram once more. "I had better see my mother at once," he said, nervously, "unless you would like to tell her."

"No ; I should not like to go near her at all," replied the Duchess, far more decidedly than she ever spoke. "She will be so terribly angry, and now William is actually coming here. I dread what she may say. She has no faith in the future, and has been so bitterly disappointed all her life, first in us and then

in William. She has never forgiven Adela, poor dear child, for being a girl ; and indeed, indeed, dear, you are the only person who can manage her at all," and the fragile little nervous woman clasped her hands round the Duke's arm and looked into his face.

"You are quite right ; I must beard the lioness in her den," he said, with a somewhat forced laugh ; "though I confess to being an abject coward ! however, it is best to get it over ;" and, so saying, he pushed back his chair and went quickly up the broad oak staircase to his mother's suite of rooms.

The Dowager Duchess was one of those women whose beauty was historical, and who in olden times would have been an Elfrida or Brinvilliers. She allowed nothing and no one to stand in her way or to disobey her commands, and was as imperious as she was, fortunately, right-minded and just. Her nineteenth-century education had caused her to become absolutely fearless, and she had made herself such a power in her husband's lifetime that even now her son could not



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manage his estates without her, and relied as much on her as his father had done from his wedding hour to the day of his death. With her eldest son, except in the matter of his children, she was absolutely satisfied. With her own daughters happily married under her auspices to suitable men she was more than content. They all came to her for advice at every critical moment of their lives, as they had done from their cradles, and depended on her still as much as ever ; but with William she had to allow that she was utterly and entirely beaten. In him all her theories of education were overthrown, and she had had to confess to herself, with bitter tears of mortification, that here was a man—bone of her bone, and flesh of her flesh—who inherited not one scrap or one tittle of the family mind or the family intellect ; who had cast off entirely her yoke, even from the days of the school room, and had positively dared to think and live for himself : the while he had a code of morals and a rule of life that were as incomprehensible to his mother as they

were vital to himself, and that were as good and absolutely free from vice as they were obnoxious to the family and foreign to the family traditions.

Angered and hurt by what the Dowager Duchess called his falseness to his order, she had petulantly declared to herself she had rather have had a gambler—a man who ran away spiritedly with his neighbour's wife, or, who, in fact, gave way to the thousand and one temptations that beset an idle man—for her son than this excellent theorist, with his benevolent fondness for the lower classes and his dangerous notions about equality, fraternity, and liberty ; while she had to allow that in his presence her aims appeared low in comparison with his, and that the barriers she loved to know existed between her and all those of whom she spoke generically as common people, felt dangerously insecure when the very men who should have guarded them with their lives gave a helping hand to those on the other side who would fain climb over and overthrow them ; and she was furthermore

constantly constrained to feel that there might, perhaps, be another world where she would have to render an account of all her advantages before those who might, in the vast Republic above, stand as considerably above the Duchess as the Duchess had fondly hoped and fervently believed she stood above them in the world below.

If there was one thing the Duchess disliked more than the People it was the idea of death. Brimful of power and strength, instinct to her finger tips with the ideas and boundless self-confidence of a born ruler, having never known a day's real illness in her life, the very idea of the helplessness and physical degradation of death made her at times feel absolutely paralyzed with disgust and dread of the strange hands that would lay her out, and the strange eyes that would overlook all her most private secrets ; the while she seemed to feel the loathsome chill of the grave, where her husband slept profoundly ; and William somehow or other always took it for granted that life here was only a

stepping-stone to other wider existences, and invariably spoke of it as such; and the Duchess being absolutely and perfectly satisfied with her possessions and position, simply shrank from any other place than the one she had filled so well and loved so emphatically; and resented her son's being more than ever, should he lightly and casually dwell on his peculiar themes, and cause her to remember that she must die. And now the Duchess's worst dreads were fulfilled, and the Barford constituency would be for the future represented by her second son, and as she gazed at the columns of the *Post*, rendered eloquent indeed by such a congenial subject, she felt as if she had at last been forced to realize that in William she had met with a stronger than herself. Every word in the *Post* leader burned itself into her brain—a renegade from the cause—a man who, to make a stir in the world, had deliberately pulled his own house about his ears—there was not a choice epithet conveyed in the elegant language of the *Post* that was not

directed at *her* son, and she had crumpled the paper in both hands in a paroxysm of rage and despair, and was leaning back, gazing stonily over the Stradfield gardens, which lay below her window in all their July glories, when the Duke entered the room and came up to his mother.

She lifted her beautiful eyes to his face, and for an instant did not speak. At last she said, in her usual tone of voice, "You have seen the *Post*, of course, Dorset?"

"A nine days' wonder," replied her son, bending to kiss her thin, heavily-ringed white hand; "but you can discuss the matter with the culprit to-night, mother, dear; he is coming to us."

"For congratulations?" asked his mother, bitterly, taking the telegram from her elder son and reading it through. "Well, he will hardly expect them from me. This is the bitterest moment of my life, Dorset. Nay! even when your father left us I did not suffer as I am suffering now; he was true to his order, and died as he had lived, a

perfect gentleman. When I think of William and then of ourselves, I cannot understand Providence. Why should such a renegade have sprung from our stock? He might have given us time in which to school ourselves to receive him," she added, once more looking at the message; "in a few days we might have been able to ignore the matter. We can't now, when the whole country is ringing with the scandal."

"I don't think it is, really," said the Duke, tentatively; "after all, it's only a by-election, and the country is not in a state of ferment, looking out for every straw to show the indication of the current; neither will William's election stave off for one day the retribution that is coming on the present Government. He will not represent Barford long, dear mother. In the meantime, does this telegram suggest anything to you?"

"Nothing; except that I ought to write and condole with poor Virginia Talbot on her boy's defeat," said the Duchess. "She will be heartbroken, after the careful manner

in which they have nursed the borough for poor Herbert. Why that tiresome old Talbot need have accepted the Chiltern Hundreds just at this moment, I can't think. His doing so gave William an opportunity that would have never been his elsewhere; but, of course, they felt sure of the people round Stanton-Talbot, and doubtless this is the effect of over-confidence. However, it is no good speculating on what William means; he is coming here, and we must welcome him. Tell Beatrice and the children to say nothing about the election; we had better ignore it altogether. Oh! why was not Adela a boy? at least the succession would have been safe. As it is——”

“As it is,” said her son, smiling; “if William steps into my shoes and you are alive to see it, mother, you'll witness a wonderful change in him. A radical duke is an impossibility. He couldn't be both duke and radical, and he will cling to his coronet; but I don't mean to leave this world if I can help it; and who knows, Beatrice may

give us a son and heir yet?" and, kissing his mother again, the Duke went down stairs to tell his wife that she had received the news much better than he could have expected, and to warn her and the whole household that no notice whatever was to be taken of his brother's successful raid on what should have been an impregnable borough.

When Lord William arrived at Stradfield—his arm yet aching from the innumerable hand-shakings he had had to endure after the poll was declared, and excited by his wonderful success—he was received with a welcome sufficiently warm on the whole, but with complete silence on the subject that was filling his thoughts, and, in consequence felt so chilled and out of *rapport* with his own family that he could barely bring himself to mention the matter which had brought him post-haste to the family house; and he would have postponed his announcement had he not been quite sure that letters were already on the way to his mother from Fulbrook which would break the news to



her in a manner that would scarcely please her.

Under these circumstances he plunged into the subject of his engagement as soon after dinner as he could manage it, and producing Jacinth's photograph, handed it to his mother, asking her what she thought of the face in it.

The Duchess looked at it long and eagerly through the gold eye-glasses that she had only lately taken into use. "She is like Caroline Carfox," she said, after a minute's pause. "Who is this, William?"

"Lady Caroline's daughter, and my future wife, I hope," he replied, quietly. "That is the news I had to tell you, mother. I want you to know her, and for her to know you."

"It is what I should have expected," the Duchess said, bitterly; "Caroline married beneath her. The Carfoxs were as poor as church mice, and she sacrificed herself for her family. I don't suppose her daughter would tell you how her father died—the Carfoxs know how to hold their tongues—but the

whole town rang with the story five or six years ago; and there was a brother, who is dreadful; and a sister who married a shopman; by the way, the brother lives in abject poverty at some village in Dorset. I see it all now, they have helped you to win this disgraceful election, and she has been thrown at your head. Well, what do you wish us to do?"

"To be honest and speak kindly, mother," replied Lord William, flushing deeply, and keeping his temper with difficulty. "Jacinth told me the whole family history, and her brother is not in abject poverty, but is the Vicar of Bevercombe. She is a true Carfox, mother; there is very little of the Merridew in her, and above all, I'm sorry to say, she is a staunch Conservative, and will not hear a word from me about politics. Wait until you see her. I did not think even you could find a fault in her, and you can see for yourself what she looks like." And he pointed to the photograph which the Duchess still held.

"I can tell nothing from that," his mother,

replied, looking at the name on the back of the card. "This is one of Bartholden's, and he touches his photographs up so tremendously, one can never rely on them; however, I suppose we must make the best of it, William, and hope that the Carfox blood will blot out the other side of the house. Are you going to bring her here?"

"If you will write her a nice note and ask her and her sister-in-law here for a few days. I certainly want to bring her at once," replied Lord William, feeling terribly chilled. "She would hardly come without your doing so, and I came here on purpose to ask you to write her a note, which I could take back with me to-morrow. I am sure the Talbots will write at once and tell you all about the engagement, for I was obliged to announce it, and I didn't want their letter to be first, or I should have hardly left Windyholme to-day. I am terribly busy there. You must come and see Windyholme, mother, and Beatrix must bring the children; it is a paradise for them, and I am sure you'd be

fascinated by the place, more especially when Jacinth is there. She holds her head like you do, mother," he added, tenderly, "and I think that is why I first fell in love with her. She walks like a princess, and is nearly as handsome as you are." And he bent over his mother's hand and kissed it gallantly.

A faint blush tinged the Duchess's check. "Ah, well!" she said, "Radical or no Radical, William, you know how to flatter. I will write the note, and, Beatrix, I think we may congratulate him, at all events on his engagement. Caroline Carfox was one of my early girl friends, and though I naturally lost sight of her when she married, I do not forget we were once close companions. Poor Caroline! her life must have been a daily martyrdom, and she once had such high ideals, was ever such a bright, impulsive girl. Ah! children, the worst of growing older is, that one recognises how much one changes, and discovers, bit by bit, that one's old self has died, and is replaced by something less true, less energetic, less hopeful, less

beautiful; and, in fact, we are taught cruelly and inevitably that our day is done, and our place is wanted for another." And so saying the Dowager Duchess rose, and, taking Jacinth's photograph with her, went to her room, ostensibly to write a note of welcome to her new daughter-in-law; really to dream over the days that were gone, and to review her past existence, and to wonder if, after all, her brilliant life and powerful will had given her real and true happiness; while she looked forward, hopefully still, to a time when William would settle down and cease to vex her by being so unlike the rest of the family. At all events, whatever filled her mind, or whatever spirit moved her, the result of her cogitations was such, that Jacinth read the letter Lord William brought her with flushed cheeks and beating heart, and set about her preparations for her visit to Stradfield with much less nervous anxiety than she expected.

She had never seen much of her mother's people, and all she had seen of them had been so little to their advantage, that she felt

dubious of the manner in which she would have to behave herself in an atmosphere so entirely different to that which filled the Bevercombe Vicarage. Ah! as usual, her wardrobe troubled her, and though, as she said to Barbara, "Waiting to replenish it would be as dreadful as those middle-class people, who keep their callers waiting hours while they change their garments, and I dare say the Duchess will not be very smart," she did wish, most devoutly, she could have had a little more luggage to convey to Stradfield than the one small trunk which contained her all, and which looked strangely insignificant and meagre in the luxurious bed-room into which she was shown on her arrival, and where presently the Duchess's maid came to assist her to unpack, and to dress for the introduction, which was to take place in the Duchess's own room just before the family dinner, and of which Jacinth thought anxiously, as, with the delight of once more having someone to do things for her again, she sat down in the low chair, and allowed Best to

take down her luxuriant hair, and re-arrange it in the way that reminded her of old times, and recalled forcibly and bitterly the contrast between her appearance, perfectly dressed, and turned out by her old maid, and that which she had presented with her hair screwed up recklessly by hands that often longed to cut it off, and to save her one of the greatest troubles of her life. And as she sat luxuriously, thoroughly enjoying her return to her old status, she felt more than ever thankful to her lover for having rescued her from penury and dulness, and for the moment at least almost loved him as he desired to be loved.

Jacinth looked like a princess indeed, as Lord William led her into his mother's room, and as the Duchess rose to receive her, she resembled her dead mother so closely, and recalled the old-time friendship so vividly that the Duchess entirely forgot her stateliness and her set speech of welcome, and folded Jacinth in her arms in a manner that impressed herself as much as it did her son. Then holding Jacinth at arm's length for a moment,

she said, "Has anyone ever told you how like you are to your mother, I wonder? I could have believed Lady Caroline had come to life again, and was here before me once more."

"I know no one who knew her when she was a girl," replied Jacinth, "and when I remember her her hair was grey, and she was always lying down. She was a great invalid for years, and her own people did not get on with my father; but I am glad you knew her; you will try and like me for her sake, perhaps."

"And for mine," said Lord William, putting his arm round her.

Jacinth drew away from him, blushing angrily. She had not yet learned to like these demonstrations "in private;" in public they seemed absolutely repellant to her. The Duchess saw her movements with approval. "You had better leave us, William," she said. "Mr. Merridew may like a walk before dinner. I am sorry Mrs. Merridew could not accompany you," she added, as the door closed on her reluctant son; "but, of course, she was right to stay with her children. And



you will soon be our own now. It is so like old times to see you, Miss Merridew. I could almost believe myself young again. I have found this portrait; it was your mother's wedding present to me. See; cannot you find yourself here, too?" and she gave Jacinth a locket from a little table, which stood close beside her chair, and was piled with a profusion of old miniatures, watches, and singular brooches and rings, most of them hideously ugly, and all of them extremely venerable and interesting.

Jacinth took the feebly executed, simpering portrait, and looked at it. It was impossible not to see the likeness, even in such a libel as the miniature really was. She was about to say so, when the Duchess spoke again.

"Of course, that gives but a slight idea of what she really was, and I actually never saw her after the day I was married. The Duke and I lived much in the country, and then she married, too, and our paths separated. But she was a portion of my girlhood, and I am glad—very glad—to share her memory

with her daughter. You will feel really my child," and she bent her stately head and kissed Jacinth's forehead. At this juncture the dinner-gong sounded, and the Duchess led her down into the drawing-room, where the Duke and Duchess were already waiting.

"This is my new daughter," the Dowager said, impressively, as she introduced her, "and your new sister. I am quite satisfied with William's choice," and in a few moments Jacinth found herself received into the family circle, while Bob, in his most correct clerical attire, felt inclined to whistle softly to himself, when he contemplated his sister's easy assumption of her new position, and remembered Bevercombe, Barbara's never empty work-basket, the dreadful every evening tea, and the very commonplace existence which had been his, and would be his, until all his father's debts were paid, and he could be emancipated from the thralldom of poverty. But the Duchess was gracious, even to Bob, and the Duke something more than gracious, when he had realized that Mr. Merridew and

“Rose’s” owner were one and the same person ; and Bob felt quite satisfied to leave Jacinth behind him for a few days, secure in the conviction that she would not be bullied, and that she was at home in a circle where he never could be anything save a mere outsider, and where he was profoundly and utterly bored. Indeed, those few days at Stradfield were among the very happiest of Jacinth’s whole life.

Although Jacinth had never benefited in the least by her position as the granddaughter of an Earl, she had all the instincts of her descent, and fully appreciated the indescribable atmosphere of refinement and “life without effort” in which she now found herself.

Of course she had, as the daughter of a rich man, been accustomed to an existence where cooks were non-existent, save as the senders up of an elaborate and perfectly cooked repast, and where all the details of housekeeping and management were entirely out of sight ; but she had never realized how perfectly noiselessly life’s wheels could run,

and how delightful such an atmosphere could be, until she entered Stradfield and discerned the graceful refinement and absolute sureness that an old house and an old family develop in a manner that is as indescribable as it is undoubtedly charming; more especially when it is unaccompanied by any of the over-recklessness and vulgarity that in these latter days are all too often characteristics of those whose mere position should entail on them obligations to set an example of rectitude to those beneath them.

The more Jacinth knew of the Duchess and of Stradfield the less could she understand Lord William's present attitude and his political views, which, however, he did not obtrude now he was in the bosom of his family, but which chafed her whenever he spoke of the future, and insinuated that the work he meant to devote his life to was something entirely different to the easy existence in which he was indulging at the present moment, and which he confessed to her, in their extremely rare *tête-à-têtes*, bored

him to death with its aimless comfort, and its enervating, luxurious purposelessness.

Indeed, Jacinth avoided being alone with her lover, whenever this was possible, and appeared to much prefer the society of his mother, who soon discovered that here was one who would assist her in every way possible to bring back William into the old narrow paths in which she longed to see him walk, and who took every opportunity available to impress on her future daughter-in-law that she should look to her to accomplish a task that lay beyond her powers, until William declared he was jealous of his mother's attractions and began to urge Jacinth to return to Bevercombe to prepare for a wedding that there was no reason whatever for postponing.

In this idea the Duchess was with him. "The sooner you are married, dear," she said one evening after Jacinth had been at Stradfield a week, "the sooner will your influence over him begin to be felt. He will dislike to see his wife ignored, as the wife of a Radical must be ignored in such other

Conservative places as Barfield and Fulbrook are ; and, furthermore, he will soon see with your eyes that his beautiful theories are utterly unworkable, and have been proved to be so long before he was born. Ah ! Jacinth, you can't tell how hopefully I am looking forward now. I am sure I shall see my boy's feet in the right path before I die, thanks to this most blessed engagement;" and she stretched out her hand to Jacinth, who took it and pressed it lovingly against her cheek.

"I sometimes feel a little bit of a traitor," said Jacinth, smiling and looking down at her engagement ring, which she twisted nervously too and fro; "William is always so sure I am going to be his right hand in all his benevolent schemes; so certain I am going to nurse his convalescents in that dreadful home he has started in Fulbrook, and so positive that I hanker with him after all the poverty and sickness he appears to think it his duty to seek out and see after, that I am tired of contradicting him and telling him that my only ambitions are to see

him a member of a good strong Conservative government, with a house in town, and an irreproachable tailor. He only laughs, for he is quite as certain of converting me as I am of converting him, and tells me I am far too unselfish really to believe half the nonsense I talk, while he implores me to help him to keep up his standard of conduct towards the People. How I do detest the People—with a capital P. I wish I could hear as little about them as they have heard of me.”

“ Ah! my dear, the pernicious liberty given to the Press is at the bottom of much of our troubles,” replied the Duchess, shaking her head. “ Those dreadful Society papers drag our names before the public, exaggerate every slip made by our order, and put all kinds of things into the heads of the mob. Whatever you do, Jacinth, never allow yourself to condescend to appear in their pages, either as hostess, or celebrity, or professional beauty. I was disgusted at one of the wretched rags—the *Wasp*, or some such name—having the audacity to give a vulgar account of

the declaration of the poll at Barford, in which you and William figured. I don't wonder you are indignant," she added, as Jacinth flushed crimson, and started to her feet. "I cannot think how these things become public property; the whole account of the dinner at those people's place was given. A copy was sent me here from the office, and I had read it through before I knew where I was. The worst of these papers is that they are so clever and amusing. I am ashamed to say I could not help smiling at this especial article, though, naturally, I was burning with indignation too. Now, if only they were dull, they would not be half as dangerous as they undoubtedly are."

"May I see the paper?" asked Jacinth, tremulously, wondering how much of the article was culled from her letters to Francis Seymour, which, now her trousseau was imminent, were more necessary to her than ever.

"I burned it at once," replied the Duchess. "Much to Best's dismay, I insisted on a fire, and reduced the scurrilous thing to ashes;



not that you suffered, or William either. Do not distress yourself about that, but I thought it best to get rid of the paper. One doesn't want one's servants to know that one's private matters are discussed openly, and that for sixpence anyone who likes may read exactly how you looked and what you wore and what you said on, perhaps, the most important day of your life. No, Jacinth, give these Society journalists a wide berth when you are launched into the world, and set your face firmly against one of the most dangerous innovations of the age, or you will never know what peace is. I often hear of them from the Duke, and am often forced to wonder from what source much of their information is derived; for even in these days of uniform education, I don't think one's men or maids are capable of such fine writing as embellishes the pages of the *Wasp*, for example."

"Perhaps the servants give the information and the writing is done in the office," said Jacinth lightly, changing the subject. "But I wished to consult you about our wedding.

William wants it at once, so that we may settle down before the First at Windyholme. The House rises about the Tenth of August, and he wishes it to be then; if so, can you put up with Bevercombe for the day? for I should dearly love you to be there. The little girls are to be bridesmaids; the dresses are to be very simple. Betty's round face must be considered, and Barbara's short purse too, poor dear; and the Duchess does not mind, William wants you all to be at Windyholme, and drive over—it is a fearfully long drive. Do you mind? If you will not promise me, I dread Issy pouncing down on us and insisting on my being married from her house, and I could not bear that. I want it to be quietly done at Bevercombe by Bob, dear old Bob! who has given me the only home I ever thought I should have; so will you promise to come to us there?" and speedily both Jacinth and her mother-in-law elect plunged into wedding details, and no more was said on the subject of William's future conversion to the Conservative creed.

### CHAPTER III.

"SO THEY WERE MARRIED."

IF, as sometimes happened, Jacinth occasionally wondered whether she could endure her future life at Windyholme in company with Lord William, that wonder ceased to enter her mind when she returned to Bevercombe and realized how sordid were the surroundings there, and comprehended even more completely than she had ever done how poor and straitened were Bob's means, and Bob's chances for the future.

Had it not been for the columns of gossip and country sketches her facile pen enabled her to supply to the *Wasp*, Jacinth would have been absolutely without means to purchase her trousseau; and though her finer feelings could not help revolting against

coining her experience under the Duchess's roof into so many yards of cashmere or so many pairs of boots, her dread of being dependent on Issy's additions to her wardrobe, and her inflexible determination to owe nothing to her *fiancé* until she was his wife, compelled her to continue her contributions, albeit she felt like the traitor she undoubtedly was, when small atoms of news picked up during her sojourn at Stradfield were pounced on rapturously by Mr. Seymour as most valuable intelligence, worth almost untold gold to a paper like his, and were at once woven into the somewhat tangled web which he delighted to place week by week before his ever-increasing circle of readers. When Jacinth, in her letters, allowed Mr. Seymour to feel that she was writing against the grain, she invariably received a larger cheque than usual, accompanied by a list of the noble ladies who assisted him in his hunt after the latest social scandals; and he almost invariably informed Jacinth that while he asked nothing from her but political, or, at the very most,

pen and ink sketches of folks she knew, other ladies in far higher positions than hers did not hesitate for a moment to add considerably to their chances of being able to pay their dressmakers, at least "something on account," by selling the secrets of their dearest friends, or by turning the bull's-eye light of a society journal on the peccadilloes of their relatives, who were not sacred when there was a chance of making a "par" out of their doings and sayings.

Not that this, even to her own eyes, made Jacinth appear less culpable; but she could not help soothing her conscience by knowing there were others worse than herself, and by declaring forcibly, if mentally, whenever she sealed up one of her contributions, that once married and free, as she hoped, of a large income, she would never write another line for Mr. Seymour or anyone else; and the day before that fixed for the wedding she sent off her last article, posting it herself, with the firm resolve that she had written the last address to the *Wasp* office.

As Jacinth turned away from the tiny office, three miles from Bevercombe itself, where she sometimes posted her letters to avoid the gossip that such an address would have caused in her own village, she appeared to realize for the first time that after to-morrow she would become an almost entirely different person; and as a shock she realized, quite for the first time, that after then she would never be alone any more, never her own mistress, her own self.

It was a perfect August day; the last box had been packed, the last note written, and the last arrangement made. There was nothing really for Jacinth to do until the tandem came back from Barford bearing Issy to take part in the ceremony of the morrow. Lord William was not expected until the day itself, and as Jacinth went on her way, she determined to take the path past Crumpler's cottage once more, and to mount the look-out in Bevercombe wood, from whence she could see the Fulbrook hills and the low-lying stretch of heather and broken field that lay

between Bevercombe and Barford itself, and where she could have at least ten minutes' peace before returning to the Vicarage and meeting Issy, whose purring commonplaces, and unfailing reminiscences, invariably made Jacinth feel as if she were rasped physically as well as mentally by her sister's presence, and of whom, in consequence, she hoped to see as little as she possibly could.

It did not take Jacinth very long to mount the steep ascent and to reach the seat where she had so often sat eating her heart out with dulness and discontent, and wondering if the weary, sameful, tasteless round of life in the country was to be hers for ever, or, at least, until advancing age had crept up and made every place equal in its attractions, because she would then have neither strength nor intellect left to care for anything beyond mere food and shelter and warmth; and as she sank down on the gnarled and rickety bench, she felt more than ever devoutly thankful that her future was to be something more than the mere mechanical process it

would have been had Lord William not come to her rescue.

As she thought of her lover, and realized how intensely different they were, how far apart were their aims in life, and how utterly unlike were all their thoughts, aspirations, and hopes, a faint misgiving as to her future made itself felt in her breast; but Jacinth was quite cognisant of the great advantage the one who is loved holds over the one who loves, and was firmly persuaded that she could in time make her husband do exactly as she liked; more especially when she would have, as she undoubtedly would, the support of his people in all she suggested, and intended to have altered, and in the future life she had mapped out for herself.

As she thought this, she lifted her eyes and gazed at the view before her; the unchanging hills, purple with heather, lay along the horizon, the dip in the centre leading down to Woodyhide, and she could just discern the rapidly rising walls of the Convalescent Home, which was the source of so much



discontent in the Fulbrook district and the cause of her own diamondless condition ; for which Lord William had apologised lightly, saying that he knew that she would far rather that health was given to hundreds of poor people, than that she possessed jewels, which after all would be of small use to the lady of Woodyhide ; to which Jacinth had responded feebly, feeling as if she wished all the clerks in London at the bottom of the sea, that raged and roared so continuously on the other side of the Fulbrook hills ; and as her eyes fell upon the white patch that meant the Home, Jacinth could have become once more as savage as she used to feel, when the idea that nothing that happened to her individually was quite perfect seized her, and caused her to stamp her foot impatiently as she looked across at the hills, the perfect loveliness of which was as nothing to the home-bred town-loving damsel.

Did it not strike her as she sat thinking there that she was beginning her married life on entirely wrong lines, that instead of

commencing her new existence hand-in-hand, and soul to soul with the man to whom she owed so much, she was even at the very first step thinking how she could compel him to follow her, to give up all his plans for the people for whom she had so profound a contempt, and to become a mere follower of pleasure and fashion? or did she think how such a career must end? No! I do not believe she did, or else she would have made an entirely different beginning to her new life; but as it was she left her seat, firmly resolved to enjoy herself as much as ever she could, and to cajole Lord William into following her as far as possible in her chase after pleasure. And as she came down the steep path that led through the dark perfumed pine-trees to Bevercombe, her face flushed and her head held high, she pictured to herself her future career as the wife of a possible Cabinet Minister in a Conservative Government. She looked so beautiful that Francis Seymour, coming to meet her, cursed the folly that had caused him to leave her

alone in her time of trouble, and which had bound him body and soul to the feeble thing which called him husband, and who was no earthly use to him in any of his ambitious designs, which he could not help knowing, now it was too late, would have been furthered indeed by the handsome, clever woman, who had never appeared to him of so much value until now, when she was utterly and entirely out of his reach. As Jacinth recognised him as he came towards her, the colour in her cheek deepened rapidly, the same wild rush of blood that invariably marked his presence, careered through her veins, and though she tried her best, the hand she held out to her old lover shook perceptibly, as did her voice, when she exclaimed, "The last person on earth I expected to see! Why, I have just written to you!"

"On business only, I suppose," he answered, holding her hand just a little longer than perhaps was really necessary. "Your letter will be opened in the office and set up in type in due course; but did you

imagine such an important person as yourself could be married here quietly at Bevercombe without a representative of the first Society journal in the land being present? I can assure you your admittance into the ranks of the aristocrats shall be duly chronicled in our pages in such a way that when you come to town people shall at once have a lively recollection of who you are, and were, and all about you; and though I can't pretend I want to see my little sweetheart of the dear old days married to anyone, the event is of such importance that I would not trust the description to any pen but my own. So here I am; and now, Jacinth, let us seat ourselves somewhere for just a few moments while you save valuable time for me to-morrow by giving me a detailed description of all the dresses, from yours and the Duchess', both Dowager and reigning power, down to Mrs. Sanderson's latest freak in the way of millinery. By the way, I travelled down with that dear lady, and was regarded by a stony stare, and—don't be shocked—an

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audible sniff that caused me to laugh in her face."

"Ah! you and Issy never got on," replied Jacinth, as she seated herself on the bank, almost close to the spot where she had first seen her future husband. "But if she has arrived, Mr. Seymour, I must go home and relieve Barbara. I am only sustained by the knowledge that all my trunks are packed and locked, and that I have the keys in my pocket, from rushing off at once. As it is, Issy won't learn much from the journey round my room I can see her making, with an eye to future reminiscences. At all events, 'Don't you remember, Jacinth?' can't have the nameless terror it has always possessed for me, for she won't be able to remember anything since we last met, I am thankful to say, and I don't think I care now for all the small pin-pricks she used to administer to me with such effect. I am even callous when I think of the long-legged white-stockinged photograph she keeps on purpose to quell me with when she thinks someone has the

bad taste to admire me. Yet still I must go back. I have been taking a mental farewell of the woods as Miss Merridew ; alas ! not altogether. I shall, I expect, see quite as much of them as Lady William Petersfield as ever I have done now. How I do hate the country !" and Jacinth stamped her foot and clenched her hand in an access of sudden rage.

"Why, only the last time we met you were raving about it," exclaimed Mr. Seymour. "Who was it said——"

"Oh ! don't remind me of that," interrupted Jacinth. "For once I am going to be myself ; for once tell the truth. I'd rather keep a shop in Bond Street than be a Duchess or a Princess of the Blood Royal in a small country place. I am sick of this miserable narrow-mindedness, the unintellectual, sameful life ; and if this is to be my portion, I shall wish myself unmarried very soon."

"Oh ! you forget the House. Lord William must be in town some months of the year, at any rate ; and we shall take care you are not

forgotten or dull," said Mr. Seymour, watching her carefully. "At any rate, the game is in your hands, the ball at your feet, and you may rely on us to help you play it well, equally as I shall rely on you. You forget what an important person you are, and what a still more important woman you will be, once you are married to a duke's son. Between ourselves, Jacinth, I don't think you understand one bit how much you have in your own hands. Lord William is a clever fellow, up to the mark of the day; brimful of philanthropy, than which nothing can be more fashionable, and he is bound to be heard of. He is just the man to dash, head first, into the fore-front of the revolution which must come, sooner or later. Ah! neither I nor you want change," he added, as he saw Jacinth start; "but I go about London with my ears open and my eyes too, and I am forced to confess that the future before England is stormier than I care to think of. The masses are heaving and struggling, and unless we are prepared to coerce London as we have coerced Ireland,

there will be mischief done, and that before long, thanks to education, and People's Palaces, and such like rot. We shan't soon be able to say our souls are our own, and your husband will be the new President of the first Republic, I have no doubt."

"I would rather die," said Jacinth, passionately.

"Oh! no, you would not," replied Mr. Seymour, dispassionately; "you'd take very kindly to the new position. After all, it would only be another name for Queen, and you'd love the power, and pose admirably as Her Majesty. You know that I am as strongly Conservative as you are; that I loathe the riot and stir of the present day quite as much as you do; but one must read the signs of the times, and these point to *bouleversement* and trouble ahead for the landed gentry and the swells generally. And though we may for a time keep them afloat by mere force of arms, we shall not be able to do it for long, and then the people will be the masters. This, no doubt, presages the end of the world; or at



least, of the world as we know it. But I give you my word we are within touch of a remarkable series of changes, and I shall look to you to keep me *au courant* with the plans of the opposite party. You and I will live to see Buckingham Palace in flames, unless it is inhabited a little more frequently than it is just now; and, after all, we have only ourselves to blame for it if it does come.”

“You are talking like a *sans-culotte* yourself,” said Jacinth, proudly. “What have we done, I should like to know, that could bring about such a state of affairs as this would be?”

“Well, if you must know, we’ve behaved like fools in a thousand ways,” replied Mr. Seymour; “we’ve educated the people, we have given them keenly tempered weapons with which to fight ourselves. Already our clerks’ sons are passing our own in the race, and we find ourselves with boys on our hands who are not even robustly vicious, as we used to be, but who are negative to a most exasperating extent; who don’t care for anything that gives them trouble, and have

neither ambition nor pluck ; who don't know the meaning of an heroic action ; who reduce everything to a dead level of common-sense, and who are so troubled about their own anatomy and health that I am sure the price of great-coats ought to rise proportionately as that of footballs and cricket outfits ought to go down. In fact, luxury has sapped the very foundations of society, and, therefore, I say we may thank ourselves for the present state of affairs, which, were I a Radical, I could see very much good in ; although, as I am a Conservative, I only perceive that for the future such people as the Fulbrook set and the orthodox Dukes and Duchesses are likely to have a rough time of it, and that, in consequence, I may suffer too ; but not being a swell, my sufferings can be mitigated ; though, I confess, I shall not care to go out much into society when Buggins, my boot-black, may be Chancellor of the Exchequer — and that boy is dreadfully sharp at figures — or when Joscelyn, the page, has a position as high sounding as

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is his most inappropriate and aristocratic name."

"And this is the sort of thing my husband is to bring about," said Jacinth in a low voice.

"And why not? You and I are aristocrats only on one side," answered Francis Seymour. "Your father and my mother could not boast of even as much as a great grandfather, and, in consequence, though I feel as much one with your Dukes as ever you will feel when you are a Duchess' daughter-in-law, I cannot help seeing pretty clearly the other side of the matter too. Life has resolved itself in these days of ours into a keen struggle for the survival of the fittest, and we who have to live by our wits must discover where those 'fittest' folks are likely to be found. Look at the pinching poverty of Fulbrook; regard the riches of such people as the Powells; and then say who is likely to be lord in this district in the next few years. Why, the very fact that old Powell continues to stand on his own legs, and remain the Dissenter

and Radical he was born, speaks volumes. He wouldn't have dared to have done so twenty years ago ; now he not only keeps his old opinions and his old religion, but does so triumphantly ; and the county have to accept him, because to him and to such as him only can they look for money to help their charities, and for the amusements they cannot afford without his assistance. Straws show the current. Such a straw as Reuben Powell's acceptation into the Fulbrook ranks shows admirably the direction the current is taking even in such an out-of-the-way district as this. I want you to *tenir salon* in the old way when you are in London, and you can only do this successfully by sinking your own prejudices and likes and dislikes, and simply keeping your eyes open, and your doors too, to anyone who is likely to be heard of : who is likely to help your husband."

"I don't want to help him politically, and I will not do so," replied Jacinth, flushing proudly. "I intend to change him utterly and bring him back successfully to the right

side. I should only encourage his vagaries a thousand-fold if I gave in to them in the way you suggest."

"Oh! Jacinth, Jacinth! clever woman as you are, how childish do you remain," exclaimed Mr. Seymour, smiling. "If I had a daughter old enough to be married, and she insisted on marrying beneath her, do you think for one moment I should oppose the dear child? Not I. I should, of course, tell her pretty plainly what the consequence of such a marriage would be ; but I should say, after that, marry your love if you like, but only after a long engagement. During that time I should take care she had every possible opportunity of seeing the very worst side, not only of her *fiancé*, but of all his surroundings, being quite sure that such a course could only result in one way. And that is how I should manage, were I you, with Lord William. The Conservative party may be selfish, slow, egotistical. Don't, please, contradict me," he added, as Jacinth made an indignant movement of dissent; "remember I am talking quite dispassionately,

and entirely from the outside; but as a rule they are a gentlemanly set. The Radicals, we know, have the unselfish love for their fellow-creatures, the burning desire to benefit mankind at large, that we poor Conservatives—land-grabbers and aristocrats as we are—cannot even comprehend; but with this unselfish love is mixed up an adoration for unwashed shirts, general vulgarity, and lowness of breeding, which Lord William cannot help being disgusted at ultimately. Give him all this; add Bulstrode's profanity, Cardew's curses, Brefort's lies, and the unvarnished elegance, and scarcely disguised murderous and thievish propensities of the Irish party—which has become one with the great Liberal cause—and in a few months the lost sheep shall return to the fold, and with a clear conscience, too! For except in one or two very fossilized cases, the present-day Conservative is far and away in advance of the Whig of bygone years, and, in fact, holds opinions which would astonish the Whig, our grandfathers on one side, used to consider a red Republican."

"I am confused between it all," said Jacinth, putting her hands up to her ears; "but I see you are right. If by any chance we do get to London, and I do have a *salon*, I shall remember all you say, and will do my best to act upon your advice; but what I dread, what I fully expect, is a life at Woodyhyde, varied by an *appartement* in some London hotel. However," she added with an effort, and rising as she spoke, "I have no earthly business to make you my Father Confessor, and talk over matters I have not even mentioned to Lord William; but old habits are strong after all, and I have got into the habit lately once more, on paper at least, of talking everything over with you in the old way. But here this must end, of course. And I have written to say, too, that I have done my last work for the *Wasp*. I should never dare to send you "pars," or even articles, from Woodyhyde, where the name of a Society journal acts as a red rag to a bull. Here we must part, Mr. Seymour; when we meet again, I shall be Lady William Petersfield."

"And your husband's faithful wife, I trust," broke in a harsh, high-pitched voice at Jacinth's elbow, startling her, and causing her to drop abruptly the hand she was holding out to Mr. Seymour. "I have been looking for you all over the woods, Jacinth. You didn't return; and knowing this person had come down in the train, I thought I had better see after you. I must say I did not expect this of you," and Mrs. Sanderson looked triumphantly at the culprits.

"And I said she'd have nothing to remember," murmured Jacinth, as she turned round and faced her sister. "Don't be ridiculous, Issy," she answered, looking at her contemptuously. "I really do not care what you expected, or did not expect. Mr. Seymour and I were arranging about the account of our wedding for the *Wasp*, and if you make yourself disagreeable, you shall either not be mentioned at all, or your dress shall be held up to public ridicule and contempt. There's a power about the Press that you little understand; so you had much better be quiet."



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"Yes, Mrs. Sanderson," said Mr. Seymour, laughing at Issy's agonized expression of countenance, "if you make yourself disagreeable about nothing, and imagine evil things which are not true, the next number of the *Wasp* will make you distinctly uncomfortable, so forbear. I have naturally been taking note of all the dresses, and my mysterious visit here is for the *Wasp's* benefit. But," added he, looking at his watch, "there are seven miles between me and a bad dinner, and as I have to walk them, I must say, 'good-bye.' It's good-bye, indeed, to Jacinth Merridew. Well, let us hope that Lady William Petersfield will be as sweet, as charming, and as glad to see me sometimes, as Miss Merridew has been! I won't hope for anything else," and so saying he shook hands warmly with Miss Merridew, and bowing low to Mrs. Sanderson, who gazed at him angrily, Francis Seymour sauntered along the pine-bordered, scented wood path, in the direction of Barford, and the sisters walked together towards the Vicarage.

"I'm an older woman than you are, dear," began Issy, sweetly, "and you had better listen to me before it is too late. That Mr. Seymour is a most dangerous man. I recollect when poor dear papa died we expected him to propose to you, and he didn't, though you must remember, as I do, how the Symptons and Hibbards talked after the water party, and then he disappeared until you bid fair to be prosperous again; and now——"

"Look here, Isabel Sanderson," interrupted Jacinth; "you must understand that for the future you are no longer required either to help or control me in the least, and that I will not listen to you or your impertinences. I can't think what Barbara was about to allow you to follow me into the woods, for she ought to know how you would construe what was a perfectly innocent and unexpected meeting into something dreadful. Not that either Barbara or I expected Mr. Seymour to be here to-day," she added. "But I will neither explain nor defend myself; suffice that I do not choose either

to be lectured, advised, or patronised by you any more; so please understand that at once, for if you do not leave me alone I will never enter your doors, or allow you to enter mine; and that I flatter myself will matter more to you than it will to me."

"You are dreadfully cross," said Issy, with a gulp that meant tears. "I only spoke for your good, and because I am anxious about you. But I remember as a child you were always wilful, even on the day you were three you walked into a mud heap because you would not listen to me when I told you that though the crust was hard it wasn't hard enough to bear you. I can see you now; mud to the knees, and——" and Mrs. Sanderson, once plunged into her congenial habit of remembering disagreeable things of her relatives, prosed on, uncontradicted by Jacinth, until the Rectory gates loomed in sight, and Jacinth, gathering up her skirts, ran for her life up the garden and into her room, where, having locked the door, she sank down upon her bed panting and exhausted, yet heartily glad to be

in the refuge of her own chamber, safe from the peculiarly exasperating tones of her sister's voice, which she could catch every now and then through the somewhat rickety walls of the old house as she maundered away to poor Barbara about London, her own dresses, her house, and finally her old husband, whom she had left at home safely, because he was not quite good enough to stand inspection from a Duchess.

Early on Jacinth's wedding morning she rose, and slipped down into the delicious walled garden belonging to the Rectory; the village bells were already chiming, and she could hear the voices of the teachers and children, who were putting finishing touches to the triumphal arches which were to surprise her on her way to church, but about which she had been secretly consulted ever since the wedding day was fixed. Far away she could catch the echo from the Barford bells; beyond these sounds, and an occasional bark from one of Bob's pets, the silence was perfect, profound, langourous, scented, delicious. A soft warm haze hung

about the trees, and the mignonette under the West wall, already running wildly to seed, was crowded by a humming mass of bees, while here and there on the rose-trees a second bloom was coming out, and reminded Jacinth of the day when she went over to the Manor tennis-party, and Lord William was, as yet, scarcely more than a name to her.

Lord William ! The blood surged up into her face, and her heart beat wildly. She clutched her hands and stamped her foot, as she remembered what his name meant now. She wanted to be married. She wanted money, position, power, an amusing, interesting life; but she did not want a husband; a man to share her inmost life, who would be always present with her, day and night, who could order her life as he willed, make her as he wished. The very idea—now it was something more than a mere idea—revolted her, and she felt like a wild creature driven to bay. There was no escape; there was no reason why there should be. He loved her; already the post had brought her his last letter,

breathing words of ardent love. That was not what she wanted. Love and she had parted long ago, and she had not the smallest desire to meet him again. All she required was peace and plenty. What was she to do? Was there no way out of it? As she thought, she lifted up her eyes, and saw her brother coming towards her from the kennels; how worn he looked, how shabby were his venerable garments, how mean and meagre was the life before him and Barbara! Bob was whistling as usual; but his merry whistle stopped as he saw his sister. Her thoughts were mirrored in her face, and she looked as she was, miserable.

“Hulloh!” he exclaimed, as he opened the latticed door of the walled garden, “You look as if you were going to be hanged, not married. Look here, Jay,” he added, coming up to her and putting his arm round her kindly, “if you don’t like your future prospects, confess to me now, dear, and I’ll get you out of this marriage somehow; anyhow. Believe me, there’s no more awful misery and degradation

than being married to a man you don't love ; and good fellow and fond of you as Petersfield is, you can't do a man a worse turn than to marry him without love. You'll chill him to death, and disappoint him more by doing that, than by giving him up now, and letting him have a chance of the real thing. I've never thought you really loved him, dear Jacinth. Don't be afraid of poverty, or what the world will say ; but give him up, even now, if you don't feel you are the happiest woman on earth, for that's how a woman ought to feel the day she gives her hand to the man she loves and who loves her."

"Ah! Bob," replied Jacinth, the tears coming perilously near her eyes, "You only know a man's side of the question ; you can't see ours. I don't expect to be very happy, ever here, in this world ; but I think I can make William happy. Anyhow, dear old boy, the die is cast, and you'll be saved the expense of keeping me, and the nuisance of hearing me grumble and growl, after to-day ; and I want to thank you for all you've been to me.

I hope I shall do well ; anyhow, it won't be your fault if I don't. But I must go in, or they'll be here before I'm dressed. Say 'good-bye' here, Bob, dear—a real good-bye ; it will only be a sham one when my story ends in church presently, in the orthodox way,—‘so they were married.’”

“And God grant my little sister the rest of the sentence, ‘and were happy ever after,’” said Bob, reverently, as he took his good-bye kiss ; then as he saw by the Vicarage windows that breakfast was imminent, he added, “and remember this, dear : whatever happens, however life treats you, or you treat life, that the old house is always yours, is always open to you. It may be well for you to know you have a haven ready and waiting for you, when the gaiety you are sure to be swamped with becomes too much for you.”

“You are a good fellow, Bob,” replied Jacinth, earnestly. “Ah ! I wish we could have carried out our childish programme and married each other ; there's nothing like a brother, after all.”



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"Except a husband," said Bob, laughing, as he held open the gate for her; "but you must run, Jacinth, if you don't want to be caught before you are dressed; for there's old goody Crumpler bearing down upon us, and you know what that means," and, so saying, Bob went off to interview old Mrs. Crumpler, while Jacinth went for the last time into her old room at the Vicarage, from which she did not come out until she was dressed in all her finery to meet Lord William at the altar; where she swore to be his only, until death parted them, with as light a conscience as if such a thing were naturally a mere matter of course.

## CHAPTER IV

## AT WINDYHOLME.

HOW good a place is home!" exclaimed Lord William, as he came in out of the gloomy damp of an October evening, just eight weeks after his wedding day. "All the way across the heath and over the King's Beacon I've seen this picture, dearest before me, and I've never noticed the gray mist on Carbarrow, or the fog in the valley, because I knew this brightness was waiting for me. You can never know how happy you have made me, Jacinth; and look what I've brought you—eight new books from Mudie's and a mysterious parcel from London. Come! these are worth a kiss at least, are not they?" and stooping down over Jacinth, as she sat in a low chair by the glowing fire

on the hearth, he drew her head towards him, and kissed her fondly. She just raised her face, put up one of her hands, and took his hand in hers, leaning her head against his warm shooting coat. It was a charming picture. Under Jacinth's artistic fingers the old house had taken a new lease of life; the big square hall, which had been dreariness itself and the home of a thousand breezes, was warmed by draperies and rendered artistic with brasses, tapestries, rugs, low basket chairs, and plenty of old oak tables. The wide hearth had been re-tiled and fitted with brass dogs and an antique basket fireplace, and as Jacinth leaned back in her dull blue chair, her dark-brown velvet dress flowing over the black and white tiles of the hall, she could not avoid knowing that the picture she had made, and of which she now formed the central figure as it were, was indeed one that an artist would have loved to immortalise.

"And how is the old Squire?" she asked.  
"I hope you have come back filled with

news, William. I must confess I am bored to death, and want to be amused. This is the third day of mist and damp, the sixth since any strange foot crossed our threshold."

"How can you notice that, except to rejoice?" replied her husband, smiling. "I look on the mist as our best friend; it has acted like the army of spectres which beleaguered the city of Prague, and has kept away a shoal of unwelcome callers. I want nothing but my little wife, and her company is my fullest joy; surely she is not tired yet of her new home," and he cast himself down on the fluffy rug at her feet and looked up at her much fatigued-looking face.

"Tired, no. I have still worlds to conquer, and the morning-room to decorate," answered Jacinth. "But I must confess I want someone to talk to about it all. You are goodness itself, dear, but you haven't an atom of taste, except that you think my taste perfect; and I want someone to argue about my curtains and chairs, and to give me hints, terribly. However, I need not bore you. Let me

hear all the Barford news, and then we'll undo the parcel and see what Collinson and Lock have to say on the subject."

"I fear poor old Wylliams is quite on his last legs," said Lord William, looking rather anxiously at the parcel he had put down on one of the tables. "But, Jacinth, don't do more decoration than you can help. I've had a whole lot of calls on me for the Home, and we must think of that before our own place, you know. I do hope to get it in order before the spring winds come, and kill off all those I want to save by the aid of the Home and our milder breezes ; but we'll talk of that presently," he said, as he saw a shade of annoyance cross his wife's face. "Let me tell you about old Wylliams."

"Have you been over to see him?" asked Jacinth, carelessly.

"No need for that, I'm thankful to say," replied her husband. "I met Bob in Barford, tandem and all, and he had just come away from Littlecroft ; the old fellow has finished his mausoleum, which he keeps ready warmed

for his reception, and was engaged in the cheerful occupation of watching a rehearsal of his funeral procession from his bedroom window when Bob reached him."

"What do you mean, William?" exclaimed Jacinth, looking puzzled. "A rehearsal of his funeral? he could hardly manage that."

"You knew he had had his coffin ready for some time?" asked Lord William. "Well, he was actually watching that being carried solemnly down the long walk by six of his men, and when Bob got to him he was shrieking with rage and using the most awful language possible because the bearers wouldn't keep step, and, in consequence, would certainly joggle his body horribly when they had to carry him; and when Bob suggested that if they did he wouldn't know about it, he used worse language still, and declared that was another reason why he should see things were in order before he went where he couldn't interfere openly; and Bob declared that those unfortunate servants were kept wandering up and down in all the rain—and

our mist is rain, I hear, at Littlecroft—until the old tyrant was satisfied; and he ended by what he called calling another rehearsal at twelve sharp to-morrow; but Bob and the doctor declare he won't be here to see it; he had excited himself so, and chilled himself so thoroughly by calling out of the window, that they don't believe he can live through the night. You might have been an interesting widow, Jacinth, if you hadn't preferred to bore yourself with me."

"What a life! what an end!" said Jacinth. "It makes my blood run cold to listen to you. What has he lived for, I wonder? What good has he ever done?"

"He gave me my seat in the House, for one thing, and he has occasionally benefited someone, if only to spite someone else," replied Lord William. "But, Jacinth, when I look at his record, when I gaze round me and see how little has been done by men in our rank of life for this neighbourhood, can you wonder that I pant to leave something better behind me than will the Talbots, for example? Poor

deserted Fulbrook! Poor beautiful Fulbrook! I want to live among my people, help my people, and I want to make the country the boon to hundreds that it is to me and you. Why should we all hurry away to the feverish town when we have lives here depending on us for almost everything; when by living in the country and loving it we can set an example that will do more good than a thousand sermons? I am convinced that's where the landed interest has come to grief. We land-owners have wanted all the pleasure and profit out of the land; but we've refused to make our home where we shall be bored; where we cannot see all that is going on in the way of theatres and pictures; and we, or, at least, some of us, are reaping the consequences. Why, every morning I see a fresh, beautiful picture from my window; the place teems with dramatic interest; and as for music, only wait until the spring, and the birds will give us that. Nay, we need not wait for that even; in the autumn we have the wind and the sea, the cry of the sea-gull, and



the call of the pheasant; and in the winter there is the robin to tell us we are not alone, or life without hope. We shan't miss music at Woodyhyde, my wife," and Lord William looked lovingly at Jacinth, who, however, was gazing too intently into the red deeps of the wood fire to return his glance.

At last she said, "Do you know we have been at home a month, and that not one soul has called upon us?"

"Why, Mrs. Pearson and Mrs. Allen came only last week, and there are at least a dozen cards in the blue bowl," said her husband, looking about for the said receptacle.

"The vicar's wife from Barford and the doctor's wife," replied Jacinth, contemptuously; "and very impertinent it was of both of them. As to the latter, I suppose she called for orders for her spouse, as the grocer did, only he came himself and didn't send his wife. I am sorry she won't be gratified. I'd sooner die than depend on local talent; and as to the others, just look through the cards, William, and you'll see I'm right in repeating

my statement, that not one soul has called on us; and I heard to-day from the house-keeper that the Talbots have a dance next week, and they have neither called nor asked us."

"What does that matter?" asked Lord William, easily. "I don't want to leave my pretty home and my warm fire to drive a mile or two to be consumedly bored at the Talbots. I shall never forget my one experience of their idea of a festivity. If these are not souls who have called, they are bodies, at any rate; and, moreover, are bodies belonging to my constituents, and you'll have to return their calls and be very civil. Seriously, Jacinth, you can make these people very happy if you choose to be gracious and admit them to your society. They won't harm us, and you can make their lives a great deal pleasanter than they are, if you care to do so, by being just a little pleasant to them. They are educated people; nice, no doubt, in their way, and all capable of enjoying themselves. Let us be the first to step over

the truly absurd line someone has drawn between county and town, and mix freely and respectably with our fellow-creatures. I don't believe in class distinctions at all; and, as I said before, it's to these class distinctions and to our absenteeism that much of the present state of depression is due in the country. I mean to live here and know everyone, and I want you to help me to make my plan a success."

"And are we never to be in town?" said Jacinth; "never to leave these eternal mists and hills, or to rub our intellects against those of clever folk? In this case, I might as well be your dog, or Mrs. Milner's cat; for certainly I shall not require to have a mind for such a life as that;" and she rose, somewhat angrily, from her chair, and began looking at the books her husband had brought from the station.

"You are a goose," replied Lord William, rising too, and putting his arm round her. "I fancy neither my dog nor Milner's cat could make my home as pretty and sweet as you

have made it ; neither could either of those estimable animals do half the good you are going to do ; besides which, you'll have no time to be bored. There are drives and rides before us, visits to isolated farmhouses where you shall see what real dulness is, and no end of things to do. I am going to teach you to love the country for my sake ; to learn all Nature's moods and ways ; to see how country people live, and to learn to mitigate the really dull lives of most of them, by giving them a share of your brightness and your good things. Then, although I am Member for Barford, you must recollect that a general election may happen any day after the House meets, and that while Talbot, poor dear fellow, is busy cultivating my constituency, I, too, must not be idle ; more especially as neither directly nor indirectly will I condescend either to bribe or coerce my people, and I must expend all my energies in educating them, and teaching them why the great Liberal party is the only party to whom they can safely entrust their interests, and why

they should vote because they are convinced of this, and not because I deal at their shops, or give to their especial vanity in the way of Church or Chapel. I hope some day all personal canvass will be made penal, and that I shall live to see the time when it shall be as illegal to ask a man how he is going to vote as it is to ask him for his money or his life ; then we shall have folks voting because they have a principle to fight for, and not because they are my tenants, or live in Talbot's houses. It is contemptible, in my opinion, that a man should actually require to have a carriage sent for him to take him to the poll, that he has not sufficient energy to reach himself on his own legs ; for a vote is a privilege, and men should be taught that it is one indeed. Then I shall look forward to times when there will be neither a Liberal nor a Conservative party, but when all the best of England's strength and intellect shall be banded together to legislate for the good of the country. Strong Liberal as I am, I would vote to-morrow for any Conservative

measure that the Opposition brought forward which I considered was for the real good of the country."

"That sounds hopeful," replied Jacinth, yawning slightly, and going to the hall door, she opened it and looked out; then, as the wind drove the mist into her face, she closed it again, and said, "More hopeful than the weather, at any rate. When does the House meet, William?"

"Not until the first week in February, I'm glad to say, and then only for vexation and trouble about this miserable Irish question," replied Lord William. "But don't let us even think of that, Jacinth. There are nearly four clear good months of hard work and enjoyment between then and now; and beyond coaching myself up in Irish history, I'm not going to think about town for at least three of the four. Oh! I forgot to tell you that Barbara is coming over for Sunday, and Bob is going to preach in Fulbrook Church. I fancy his sermons will astonish the Talbots just a little, and I am quite looking forward

to seeing their faces. Why, what's the matter, Jacinth?" he added, as he saw a look of dismay cover her face. "I thought you'd love to see Barbara again; but perhaps it is a little soon to have our peaceful evenings broken in on. Still, I really couldn't help it, more especially as Bob had arranged to preach for old Steers, whose son-in-law has died suddenly."

"Oh! it's not that," said Jacinth. "Two months of a honeymoon are enough in all conscience; but you know what Bob is and what Bob's sermons can be; and I've heard that the Talbots have filled their house for this dance, and all the Vale and the Abbey people will be here on Sunday. They'll carry the tale of our doings to the other side of the county. Oh! William, William! why were you changed in your cradle, or why did you pick up all these horrid Radical ideas?"

"Perhaps it's as well for you I did," replied her husband, laughing, "or I should have been married quite correctly ages ago to some Lady Clara or other, and settled myself down

in London, coming here for the shooting, and that alone ; and then where would you have been?" and so saying, he kissed her once more lightly, and remarking cheerfully that it was time to dress for dinner, he went up the wide staircase towards his room, whistling gaily as he went.

Jacinth stood where he had left her ; looking absently at the book in her hand, yet not seeing as much as the title. She had been married two months, but up to the present time she had made no impression on her husband's political views, or on his determination to remain in the country. She had more than once attempted to express her opinions both on the subject of a town residence and a reversion to the family creed ; but, whenever she had done so, she was met with such surprise, and even ridicule, on the part of her husband, that she perceived she could do nothing on either subject, at least at present ; for there was really no making progress with a man who took all one's high-flown ideas as mere romance, and regarded the idea of a



town house as a chimera to be disposed of with a joke and a laugh.

Indeed, Lord William was so absurdly happy, so positively contented with his lot, that he really and actually could not understand that Jacinth could differ from him in her likes and dislikes. Her little Conservative dogmas were treated by him as the mere phantasms of youth ; and that a girl who had lived some years in a country vicarage—without money, horses, winter flowers, the thousand-and-one things with which a good income mitigates the undoubted dullness of a truly country life—should want to go to London, when the streets were knee-deep in mud and thick with fog, appeared to him so impossible, that this scarcely troubled him for a second, for he was quite convinced that if he were as happy as he undoubtedly was, Jacinth must be so, too.

As Jacinth waited in the hall for a few minutes, before going up to dress for dinner, she began to wonder if, after all, she had not been happier at the Vicarage ; there, at all

events, her fate was not fixed. At any moment the knight-errant, who was to rescue her from an untoward fate, might come riding across the heath and bear her away to the enchanted land of London. Lately she had had the weekly excitement of writing for the *Wasp*, and always receiving that amusing journal ; and then, too, courtship had been far more entertaining than she found marriage ; and as she remembered Francis Seymour, and the old warmth of her love for him, she made up her mind that go to London she would, if only to see once again the magic circle that might have been her own, and to mix once more with those who, in her eyes, made history ; while an uneasy feeling seized her that she had been far too much in a hurry, and far too sure of her power over her husband. She should have made her lover promise what her husband would have been bound in honour to fulfil.

As the days went on, and as the Radical Member was severely boycotted by those who would have gladly enough swallowed

his principles had he been unmarried, or mated to one of their own order, Jacinth began to feel as if the monotony of the life at Windyholme would end by driving her out of her mind.

Lord William had all a man's resources—those resources which make country life so enthralling to men, and which blind them always to the fact that for a woman whose intellect is above that of the ordinary, gossip-loving country born and bred damsel, the country is nothing more nor less than a living tomb. And he was so happy over his plans for regenerating the folks round him, and for giving them as much as he could of his shooting, his books, his superior advantages, that he could not perceive that Jacinth was daily waxing more and more silent, and that she hardly ever went outside the doors, except to drive over to see Barbara and have a few minutes' talk with her brother. When Lord William, after a long day's shooting or hunting, came home, eat a hearty dinner, over which he recounted

his success to ears that didn't understand half or a quarter of what he was saying, and then fell asleep in his armchair, with Jacinth's hand in his, he was so happy, so full of his plans and his amusements, that he did not perceive his wife was miserable, and had no plans of her own to discuss, no adventures of her own to relate; and he was, in consequence, almost wonderstruck when he returned home one day in January, much earlier than his wont, and found Jacinth in her usual seat by the fire, her hands lying idly in her lap, and the slow tears coursing gently down her face.

That Jacinth had cause for tears struck him as with a knife; she must be ill. Robert or Barbara must be very ill or dead, something dreadful must be the matter; and throwing himself down on his knees by her side, he implored her to tell him what had happened since he went out in the morning. As he spoke he looked at her more closely than he had done for some time. He could not help remarking how pale she was, and how sad; and while he implored her to speak, a dread

of what he might be called upon to bear darted through his brain, and he felt how truly and ardently he loved his wife.

Jacinth pushed his encircling arms away, and rose from her chair. "Nothing has happened at all," she said in her usual quiet tones. "Why are you back so soon?" And wiping her eyes quickly she took up the paper, which had fallen from her listless fingers, and turned over the pages rapidly.

"This won't do," said Lord William, firmly, and taking the paper away. "I go out, leaving my little wife in her usual spirits, and I come home to find her dissolved in tears, and I must please know the reason why. I hardly expected to find you in, such a lovely afternoon; though it is January, the sun is like April, and the view from the Beacon is a sight to be seen. It's not too late now. Let me order the pony carriage, or, put on your hat and come out with me; it will brighten you up before dinner, and I can show you the Home." And, so saying,

he put out his hands and tried to draw her towards him.

Jacinth looked at him calmly; but the passion of hatred she began to feel towards her husband and everything connected with Windyholme broke down her barriers of reserve; and it was the reverse of calm that animated her looks at last when she turned to him, dashing aside his proffered hands, and exclaiming, "You want to know what is the matter? Well, then, I will tell you. I am dying of the dulness of this awful place, and unless I can get away from it I shall go out of my mind. I was beginning to think I could school myself to an absolute state of inane quiescence; that I could bear my life to drift along, getting up in the morning and going to bed, and eating and sleeping, like an animal, but I can't; the very sight of a London paper brings it all back to me, and I am more miserable than I could ever have dreamed it possible for me to be. I was a hundred times happier at Bevercombe, much as I hated the squalor and poverty of my lot there, than I

am here, and I am determined that I will not live as we have been doing an hour longer. You have no right to pen me up here, to keep me in this prison, and to spend all your money on a parcel of odious people, who take all you do for them as a right, and no doubt laugh at you, as you deserve, behind your back. The very way we have been treated in Fulbrook should tell you how you are regarded. You should need no words of mine to inform you how you are throwing away all my happiness for a mere chimera; the country is played out, and you will never regenerate it, though you may calmly kill me and sacrifice me to your fads ;” and, bursting into a flood of angry tears, Jacinth flung herself down on the rug, and, hiding her face in the low chair, cried bitterly.

Her husband was thunderstruck. How could a girl who had never had a horse to ride or ponies to drive, or a new book or a new dress, be miserable in such a house as his? What was there in this mysterious London which drew her heart away from

him and the peaceful loveliness of his beloved Fulbrook? To him London meant dirt, heat, no room to breathe, a blind following of a society he loathed, and which struck him with horror and amazement every time he returned to it. He loved the country as only people who are born and bred there can love it; to him the marvellous procession of seasons was more enthralling than any play or novel could be. He felt he could do more good in an hour by living among his own people and caring for them, in sharing with them all he had, than he would be able to do in a year away from them, and setting that example of absenteeism which was, he felt convinced, at the bottom of so much of the world's misery; and now all his plans, all his hopes for the future, were to be dashed to the ground by the very hands which should have been held out to help him !

True, the Session began in a few weeks, and of course he must be in his place in the House, but he had hoped to have left Jacinth as a species of vice-regent for him at Fulbrook,



returning to her every week as a matter of course. He would live at his club, or put up with his brother ; he could not manage a house and do justice to his own place and his Convalescent Home too. At last he said : " My dear, dear child, do stop crying and listen to me. I can't talk to a back, and I cannot become as eloquent as I should wish, when you sob like that. Tell me quietly and patiently what you want me to do, and I'll see what I can manage. I thought my mother had asked you up for a week or so in May?" and Lord William pulled his moustache thoughtfully, and looked again at his wife, who once more wiped her eyes and rose from her lowly position on the floor, her movements accelerated more by hearing the approaching jingle of the tea things than by her desire to speak to her husband. But at last she said :

" I want to go up to town when you do, and have a proper house and see people properly. I want to be presented and to take my proper place in society, and I don't want

to waste any more of the best years of my life in this hole, where I have not a soul to speak to, and nothing to do."

"There are a thousand things for you to do if you would but do them," exclaimed her husband.

"Oh! of course; I know what you mean. Betty Smith's baby to look after, and see he's properly christened and vaccinated, or those terrible Barford women to conciliate," exclaimed Jacinth, angrily. "But I will have none of them here; they are simply dreadful, from the lawyer's presuming little wife, who wants us all to forget where he sprang from, to that terrible spinster in the 'Drong,' who gives herself frightful airs because her people have lived for centuries in the same house, and have provided the Corporation with town-clerks for the same space of time; as if she ought not to try and conceal the lack of sense and enterprise which must have characterised her male relations, instead of boasting of their supineness, and looking upon it as a patent of nobility. No, William, I

loathe—I have always loathed the country, and now my loathing almost maddens me, and I feel I must see London or die;” and so saying, Jacinth flung herself down into her chair, and, drawing the tea-table towards her, began to pour out tea with a shaking hand.

“What is there in London which draws all its victims towards it?” asked Lord William, sadly. “What does it hold, I wonder, that causes it to be the loadstone of England, and which compels the poor to leave the fresh, sweet country, and drags them up to choke and die of the dirt and squalor that revolts me so whenever I think of it, that I could hope never to set eyes on the hateful place again? What is there in London to replace our bright skies, our pine-scented breezes, our dancing, beautiful, ever-changing sea? What can it give in exchange for the freedom and loveliness of our country life? Ah! Jacinth, pause; you little know what you do when you persuade me to leave all this; to give up my idea of coaxing back the old stream of life into these free country

wilds. If we, who ought to know better, persist in spending all our lives in London, how can we expect those who do not know its falseness as we do, to stay in this quiet safety?"

"I would not persuade anyone I cared a fraction for to remain in the country," exclaimed Jacinth, fiercely. "Why, even the maid-servants there have excitement and pleasure that the poor girls in Barford and in these ghastly farmhouses never hear of, let alone participate in."

"Yes; I grant all that," said Lord William, quietly; "but, Jacinth, have you never heard how often the girls we send up to London come home only to die; or, worse still, never come home at all? Who knows whether, in some life hereafter, we may not be held responsible for these lives? John Spicer's grand-daughter would not have died in the hospital in the awful way she did if the old traditions of the Great House had been kept up; but the owner was an absentee, and there was no want of young servants then in Fulbrook."

“Let us understand each other, now or never, William,” broke in Jacinth, impulsively. “I have always told you frankly I am no philanthropist. I don’t want to regenerate anyone. I only want to enjoy myself. Believe me, you would be far happier if you could make up your mind to the undoubted fact that the country is played out, and that we are not responsible for anyone or anything except ourselves. You have tried your plan and found it a dismal failure. Now try mine.”

“I cannot allow I have failed in anything, except in making you happy,” replied her husband, sadly. “The place has never looked so well, or been so prosperous; the Home has already given work to dozens of men; the matron has engaged servants; and, in fact, Fulbrook is looking up. Why, Jacinth, old Talbot met me to-day, and actually made me a civil speech, because the Guardians in Barford had never had such an easy winter before. Isn’t that worth living for?”

“Oh! you are hopeless,” replied Jacinth,

bitterly. "However, as you won't listen to me, look out for yourself. Issy has asked me up next week, and I shall go."

"I can't have my wife staying at old Sanderson's," said Lord William; "my mother would never forgive me. We'll compromise matters, Jacinth; you shall go up with me to an hotel, as soon as the House assembles, and we'll see how soon you'll tire of the noise and turmoil of your beloved town. Come, little woman, give me a kiss. Have a walk before dinner, on the cliffs, if only for a few minutes, and chase the black monkey off your shoulders, as we used to say to the children; and you will soon be very sorry you have abused me and poor Windyholme in the way you have. I think, too, our 'boycott' has broken down. Mrs. Talbot says she is coming to call to-morrow."

"I shall be out," exclaimed Jacinth, passionately. "She has taken nearly six months to make up her mind as to my respectability, and I shall not see her."

“There’s no pleasing you to-day,” said Lord William, laughing. “Come, Jacinth, put on your hat and your sealskin, and let us discuss the relative merits of the London hotels in the open air. I dare say you have them all at your finger-tips. The Session begins next week, and I may as well make you very tired of town before the spring turns Windyholme into an earthly paradise. I wonder how soon you’ll be begging and praying me to take you away from the heat and discomfort of town?”

“Wait until I do,” said Jacinth, brightly, putting on the out-door garments her maid brought her. “Now, as you have promised to take me, let us talk of other things. Did you hear that the Squire was dead at last, and, worse still, that a *bonâ fide* heir has turned up? I should have been a portionless widow if I had married him, as all goes with the property if there was a son, and there is.”

“By Jove!” exclaimed her husband, “then you have not done so badly in marrying me, after all?”

“Not if you take me to London, and let me stay there,” replied Lady William; “the bare idea of that makes me feel quite young. Let us run down to the shore,” and taking her husband’s hand, she ran down the declivity between Windyholme and the sea, feeling younger and happier than she had been since the first day she set foot in her husband’s home.

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## CHAPTER V.

## A FIRST SEASON.

THE united strength of the family soon caused Lord William to give up his idea of a few days a week in an hotel; and in a very short time he found himself settled for the season in a delightful flat on the Embankment, from the windows of which he could look across the low grey river to the flat green fields of Battersea, and fancy that he was within reach of the wide heath and the flowing streams of his beloved Fulbrook; and though Jacinth declared she was miles away from anyone and everything, she was too astute to draw the reins too tightly, and contented herself with turning the rooms into æsthetic arrangements of colouring and drapery, feeling more than rewarded for her trouble when she perceived the effect they

had upon her friends when they came to call, and troubling herself not at all about the expense she had incurred ; for had not her husband a princely income, and how could he spend it better than on making himself and his surroundings talked about, and in emphasizing the fact that he had married a wife who not only could hold her own, but could take the lead, should it be necessary for her to do so ? To be talked about ; to be chronicled in the Society papers as the inventor of a bold style of decoration and dress ; to be a star wherever she appeared ; to be known of by all the lesser literary folks : could fate have anything better in store for her ? And as Jacinth gradually felt her way, she began to think that the Radical element in which she found herself was, after all, not such a bad thing, as it enabled her to at once become prominent, which she felt would not be the case were she to decline her husband's friends entirely and depend only on the two Duchesses for her society.

The Dowager Duchess, and, indeed, the

reigning Duchess also, had nothing whatever in common with the society of the present day. The brilliant rowdy circle which desecrates the Sunday and elevates the theatres and so-called art and *artistes* above the heads of the old nobility, shocked and angered the elder lady and frankly bored the younger, to whom her nursery and her husband were far more than anything else could ever be ; and though the decorous town house was opened for a short time each season, it was only opened to those who shared the prejudices of the owner, and who would have as soon attended a levee on the boards of a theatre as they would have countenanced the loud-voiced ladies of the Primrose League, or the burlesque-acting women who, under the guise of charity, forgot all the old traditions of the race to become bad copies of those who, in former days, would not even have been mentioned before them.

No doubt Dorset House was dull, but somehow or other invitations to the ball, or the half-dozen dinners given during the season,

were eagerly looked out for, and regarded as very few invitations are nowadays; but Jacinth was sure of these as one of the family, and therefore had no reason to cultivate the Duchess, and soften down her "asperities" in her dealings with the family, who looked to her to regenerate her husband, and regarded her countenance of the noisy members of the herd as an astute plan to sicken Lord William of the associates supposed to be inseparable from his principles, but who were in reality conservative of Conservatives, and Primrose Leaguers to the man and woman, and who were as unlike the earnest would-be regenerators of mankind Lord William loved as anything could well be.

Undoubtedly the fact that Dorset House loomed in the background gave Lady William a *locus standi* she would not otherwise have possessed; and when she began to feel her feet in London once again she forgot the passionate hatred she had commenced to nourish at Windyholme, and was fain to confess that her marriage had brought her far more happiness

than she could ever have hoped; and naturally her heart opened to her husband, and she almost loved him as he deserved.

Not that she could at present, at all events, do that, for she was not half worthy of his unselfish, ardent affection, his noble heart, his wonderful plans for the good of his fellow creatures, and his modern religion, which forced him to long to regenerate those beneath him, and prompted him to administer his fortune as if others had as much right to it as he; but once plunged into the heated atmosphere of politics, he went his way, regardless of the fact that Jacinth would go hers, and only demanding from her her sympathy when he talked over his plans; content to feel she was happy, and to see her bright face and her charming home, whenever he could snatch a moment to sit down by her and talk over the future of England, or his own particular corner of it.

To avoid the disagreeable necessity of discussing money matters, Lord William had put a certain portion of his income into

Jacinth's hands, and had told her that that must include everything, and that she could not rely on him for another farthing; that the £10,000 he was prepared to spend, was all that could be spent; and that the £6,000 he put into her hands must keep the house going entirely, and must clothe her and entertain his friends. The rest was wanted at Windyholme, and for the village colony he was gathering round the home on the breezy slopes of Fulbrook; where he intended to despatch all those who could yet be regenerated by pure air and clean living, before going farther afield, may be, to begin a new life in a new land. And as the colony was to be provided with a model church, a model rector—Lord William had hopes of enticing Bob from Bevercombe for this—model manufactories, and all kinds of model fads, the other £15,000 put aside for this, and the maintenance of Windyholme itself, would not go beyond the village, and indeed, would hardly cover all it was meant to do; and, in consequence, Lord William had been most

emphatic over the details of the £6,000, reserving for the horses, house-rent, and his own personal expenses the other £4,000.

At first, the mere sound of such a sum appeared riches to Jacinth. £500 every month to be spent! Why, surely she should never lack more than that; but the furnishing of the flat came to £2,000, and muddle began from that moment, and from the day when it seemed quite easy to pay £150 for a Court-dress, which deserved and obtained a special puff for its maker from every paper in town; and when each party given by her rapidly-increasing roll of acquaintances meant something more to overtop, some other risky entertainment to plan and carry successfully to the end; and if at times she attempted to discuss finance with her husband, she received no help from him, for he refused to hear there could be any difficulties, and reminded her that she had received an allowance simply to obviate such discussions, which he, for one, had always cordially disliked, and which he should have thought she would dislike too

as much as he did. Any idea of supplementing the income from that put aside for Windyholme he at once vetoed ; that was non-existent as far as Jacinth was concerned ; it was devoted to his poor, and to illustrate a plan he hoped the State would be induced to copy ; for the over-crowding of cities and the gradual desolation of the beautiful silent country, and the emptying of healthy country towns, were subjects that engrossed Lord William more and more, and were, furthermore, problems he was setting himself heart and soul to solve. One night, when the season was beginning to wane, and when already the bills contracted in February were commencing to be the subject of Jacinth's rather complicated financial schemes, and the idea of saving for which made Windyholme appear in rather a different light to the one in which she had regarded it when she left, Lord William had brought back two or three of his closest friends to dinner, and as was but natural, the proposed village settlements were the principal subject of conversation.



It was a very hot night in July, one of those nights when London bedrooms, even of the largest size, became like ovens, and when dining-rooms and dinners are purgatory ; the windows in the drawing-room were thrown wide open, and the river and the fields beyond looked like some foreign picture ; the river could be heard washing against the stone embankment, and every now and then a laden steamer would puff by, making unearthly screeches as it neared a pier and gave off some of its superabundant load, ere making its way back into the heart of the city.

Jacinth, in a long white dress and broad yellow sash, made in the very latest fashion, leant back in her low chair on the balcony and looked out. The deep yellow roses in her dress and on her fan scented the air heavily, but could not quite conceal the fact that Father Thames had also felt the burden and heat of the day, and resented the fact of so much sunshine.

"After all," she said to her companion, Mr. Armitage, the very Broad Church vicar

of an East-end parish, who lived among his poor, and who would have to traverse an expanse of street before he reached his house, redolent of over-ripe fruit in summer, of over-fried fish in winter, well known to Lord William, but most carefully avoided by his wife. "After all, I am glad there is country somewhere; London is appalling, once the season begins to wane, and cabbage stalks and plums pervade the place. I hope the House will rise soon, and let me go away. I want to go abroad, but I have a tyrant for a husband, as you know, and he insists on Windyholme. Well! even Windyholme would be better than this, I think. When do you go away, Mr. Armitage; and are you coming to us?"

"I would I were," replied the vicar of St. Cyprians, sighing, "but, alas! this is our very busiest time, and I am tied by the leg. There are our country holiday children to look after and a thousand things I need not trouble you with, Lady William; and my part in Windyholme will be the selecting

men and women for the model village. How profoundly interesting you must find that !”

“ Ah ! you don’t know Lady William as I do,” said Francis Seymour, who was a constant visitor at the flat. “ She and I are survivals of a past generation which loathed slumming and didn’t bother about its poor in the tiresome way all you people do now. You young folks are all so earnest ; we old ones are frivolous butterflies, and only wish to enjoy ourselves.”

“ I am some years older than you, I take it ; several years older than Lady William,” replied the very literal vicar, “ therefore my youth can’t be to blame. Ah ! I am sure Lady William sympathises with her husband, and is longing to be among the poor creatures we see so much of. When I think of such a night as this is in the model lodging-houses in the courts, and contrast it with a night on the windy heights of Fulbrook, I am more than ever convinced that your husband will be the true regenerator of mankind, if he can only win back some of the arts and industries

to the lovely country, and so lead away the workers from our teeming cities to the peace and plenty of the country once more ; and I feel sure you are his help-mate, in the truest sense of the word, Lady William."

Jacinth rose, and leaned over the balcony, looking at the river before her. At this moment her carriage drew up, and she recollected with a start she was due at an *al fresco* entertainment a little way out of town, in the house of one of the newest literary women of the day, whose reputation had been made rather suddenly by what the *Times* called the "cleverest attack on revealed religion which had been made for many a year," and whose parties just at the moment were the things to attend. "I am sorry to disappoint you, Mr. Armitage," she answered, carelessly, "but I hate the model village and everything connected with it, and look upon it as a sink into which my husband pours all the enjoyments which would otherwise be mine. I agree with Mr. Seymour ; he and I are survivals of a past generation, when

folks could and did enjoy themselves without an *arrière pensée*. Now, thanks to your educating of the masses, instead of ordering we have to conciliate. To prevent ourselves being robbed of all we possess, we are obliged to give away three-quarters of our incomes to those who would steal all did we not give them what they demand ; and, in fact, if you and Lord William go on as you are doing we shall soon have nothing left. I know my husband grudges me even this modest corner of London, and would prefer to remain always at Windyholme, therefore you cannot expect me to aid and abet him in his schemes to condemn me to imprisonment for life. But I am afraid I must leave you to him. I am due at Mrs. Stephenson's, and must say good-night. I suppose you are coming, Mr. Seymour?" and Jacinth looked round for her maid with her wraps, and nodded a careless good-night to her husband's guests.

But Lord William had heard her last words, and breaking off his conversation with

Mr. Kent, the architect, whose portion in the new village was to draw elaborate plans for nothing, of impossibly perfect cottages and decorated pig-styes, in which no pig which respected itself would have lived for a moment, he came forward, and as he arranged his wife's cloak, he said : " You surely aren't going to the Orange Grove, Jacinth ? I thought you knew my opinion of that woman."

" Your opinion and the world's opinion don't agree," replied his wife, carelessly. " I don't share her ideas on the subject of religion, as you know. I'm far too great a coward to dispense with 'bogey' and all the rest ; besides, irreligion is bad form in every way, but just at present her book is all the rage, and everyone will be there. I wish you'd come, William ; I should love to laugh over the people afterwards, and I shall have no one to do it with."

" I don't go to people's houses to laugh at them," said Lord William. " That's worse form than being irreligious."

" But it is not thought so," said Jacinth,

flippantly. "However, go I must, or I shall have Cooms giving me warning, and that will never do; and some of the most amusing people go to bed early, and I must fly or I shall miss them. Come, Mr. Seymour;" and without waiting to hear her husband's reply, Lady William ran down stairs and was soon driving Putney-wards with the editor of the *Wasp*.

The "Orange Grove" was one of those houses now rapidly disappearing under the hands of the speculative builder, but at present it successfully held its own against the advance of civilization, as represented by the eligible residences and tiny gardens, which have replaced the stately houses and large pleasantries once dear to the heart of the merchant princes of London; and, in consequence, was a place to see, even had it not contained the lioness of the season, who was as much astonished at her position as anyone else, and bore her honours meekly enough, being rather overcome with her fate, and utterly unable to demonstrate by her life the doctrines

she had inculcated in her book; which was rather the outcome of a species of inspiration than the development of long processes of thought; but she was clever enough to conceal her astonishment, and had spent a delightful season receiving the adulation that fell to her share, and turning over to her chosen friends those among her worshippers whose ideas flew miles over her own head, and would consequently have bored her considerably.

This evening was to be a species of return for all the invitations which had been hers, and was looked forward eagerly to by that curious section of the literary world which lives on the outskirts of thought, and scribbles more because of the few pounds it makes a year than because it has anything to say for itself.

Among this section can be found hard-workers enough, but whose work consists in the mere grubbing among the garbage for anything that will make a 3s. 6d. "par" in the smaller society papers; who wander from



shop to shop in search of the latest fashions, in order that a description of these may result in a new bonnet, cast at them ungraciously enough by the tradesmen; who in these days of advertisement cannot afford to offend one of these paragraphists, and who describe each other's garments and appearances in their separate journals, rejoicing each time they see their names in print, as otherwise, their lucubrations being anonymous, they would be debarred this overwhelming joy; and giving elaborate accounts of the costumes which have often enough come piece by piece to them, in acknowledgment of an enthusiastic account of the marvels to be found in Messrs. Snippets & Cutt's new establishment, and which generally are so fearfully and wonderfully put together, that they merit kind oblivion rather than the glare of public print.

Jacinth was far too clever to lend her countenance to this band of hungry females. A sharp note from her husband to the divers editors had shown them that nothing—not

even an invitation—was to be gained by a description of her gowns and parties ; and, though Jacinth herself would rather have liked the cheap celebrity of an occasional line in the *Wasp*, Francis Seymour and Lord William understood each other ; and all the season she had been simply ignored by the papers, though everyone who was anyone knew her well enough, and required no newspaper to inform them of Lady William's dresses and doings, for they were in evidence everywhere.

Until she made Mrs Stephenson's acquaintance, at an afternoon party given by Mrs. Seymour to celebrate the fourth birthday of the *Wasp*, Jacinth had never met that most curious development of the nineteenth century, "a lady journalist," and she had not been impressed by the specimen to whom she was introduced ; but Mrs. Stephenson was different. Her husband was one of the finest portrait painters of the day ; her house an historical one ; and Jacinth had looked forward to the evening with great curiosity,

for Mr. Seymour had told her about the house and the people she would most likely meet, and had warned her that the pencil and notebooks of the sisterhood would have to be faced, for nothing would keep them quiet once they knew Lady William was there. But when Jacinth drove up to the wide-open door of the Orange Grove, she was hardly prepared for the reception she received, and for the sight of three or four showily-dressed women who were leaning over the square balcony which surrounded the wide staircase, and who, as each name was announced, scribbled shorthand notes of *costumé* and appearance in the owner's face, did the name called out belong to anyone who was of sufficient interest to be spoken of in either of their respective journals ; for her name created quite a stir among them, and one boldly rushed forward, and before her very eyes, while she was speaking to her hostess, looked her dress up and down carefully, making notes as she did so : finally elbowing her way between Lady William and Mrs. Stephenson

in her desperate endeavour to leave not a bow unchronicled or a fold undescribed in a gown which came from an establishment that could afford to do without the professional puffer, and that was therefore inaccessible to poor Mrs. Surtees, who would have given her ears for five minutes' talk with the maker of Jacinth's gown.

As Jacinth, disgusted with this open impertinence, was about to pass on into the wide conservatory, beyond the dancing-room, where the celebrated orange-trees were in full flower, Mr. Seymour came up the stairs, and nodded carelessly to the band at the top. He laughed as he saw Jacinth's disgusted appearance, and Mrs. Surtees' triumphant last scribble in her silver-bound 'morocco note-book. "It won't do, Mrs. Surtees," he said; "Lady William Petersfield's dresses are forbidden fruit."

"Then she shouldn't come here," replied Mrs. Surtees, snappily; "however, I've got her down, and I shall use her somehow. We don't often see Propert's dresses here, or get

such a good chance of describing them ; and I know what our man will say to this. It's good for at least half-a-column, and I don't suppose she ever sees our paper. We are not swells, like you and the *Wasp*, Mr. Seymour, and we aren't seen at your clubs."

"No; but some kind friend is sure to send Lord William your paper, and he has a long arm, Mrs. Surtees. A word to the wise, you know," replied Mr. Seymour, easily. "Don't offend either Lord or Lady William. He didn't like her coming here to-night, and if you drag her into the papers, I shall never be able to take her anywhere again, and I have half promised she shall see a meeting of the Symposium;" and so saying, Mr. Seymour sauntered after Lady William, who was being shown by her host some of the beauties of the place, which were beautiful enough to attract anyone, and more than compensated for the long drive from town, which had been taken by many of the guests, and the idea of repeating which was already beginning to agitate the breasts of many of them.

The wide conservatory, with its branching orange-trees, led into the garden, which was now brilliant with lamps, and looked like an old picture of Vauxhall. The river ran silently past, and a large barge was moored close to the bank, where the "Blue Hungarian" Band was stationed to discourse sweet music; in one corner of the grounds a celebrated glee-party sang Mendelssohn's open-air glees; and in yet another, preparations were being made for a representation of some of the scenes from Shakespeare, the production of which, in a neighbouring garden, had been attended by Royalty, and pronounced the hit of a very prolific season.

"We have been only waiting for you to begin," said Mr. Stephenson. "If you will remain here, Lady William, I will collect the audience and turn on the electric lights. I don't think even a July moon will give us sufficient light, and we were afraid to trust to such chances of good weather as we usually experience. Ah! here is Seymour, and I can leave you safely for a few moments; now,

Seymour, just blow this, there's a good fellow ; you'd do me a service if you will," and handing Mr. Seymour a silver whistle, the hard-worked host plunged off into the shadows between the trees and left Lady William and Mr. Seymour the sole tenants of the wide amphitheatre which had been thrown up for the accommodation of Mr. Stephenson's guests.

"What a night !" said Jacinth, softly, "and how different July feels here to what it does at home. I wish Lord William would take a place like this until the House rises ; this is quite country enough for me, and he could drive to the House easily ; hot as town is, I shiver when I remember Windyholme, and that dreary, dreadful little Barford ; and I suppose once back there, there I shall have to stay until February at least. I begin to wish the House never rose at all."

"Have you heard rumours of a dissolution ?" asked Mr. Seymour, sinking into a low chair at her side, and quite forgetting the whistle.

"I hope and pray not," exclaimed Jacinth. "William thinks he is certain of his seat, but I am not so sure. He has driven the Fulbrook people nearly mad by this village scheme of his, and alienated the farmers by raising the scale of wages and getting better cottages built. It will be a hard fight, whenever it comes; but I think we shall win if Lord William has time to demonstrate to the farmer that, after all, he is his true friend, and that it is to his interest to keep the people in England to consume his wheat, his milk, and his butter, and so on."

"Have you been converted to Liberalism?" asked Mr. Seymour.

"Not I, indeed," said Lady William. "I hate all the fads of the party worse than ever, but I have given up the idea of converting my husband, and I think I would subscribe to anything that kept me in town. I would give worlds if he were a Conservative, and would live like the rest of his people; but I don't know that in these days that would better the case much. We



should have still to conciliate the masses that Liberalism has released from their restraining bonds; and no doubt the Primrose League would cost as much time and money as the model village. It's an age of fads, and I wish I had been born a hundred years ago. I begin to think Russia is the only place fit to live in; and even there they have emancipated the serfs."

Mr. Seymour laughed. "Marriage has not changed you at all, Lady William; you and your husband agree to differ, evidently. I must say he is a sensible man. I am always amused when I see a fellow who has fallen in love with a girl as she is, marry her, and immediately begin to turn her into a bad copy of himself, and resent it immensely if she does not become his feeble echo. Presumably he didn't fall in love with her possibilities, but her actualities; yet I have never yet met a married man who does not try, as I said before, to change the girl he fell in love with into something as utterly different as possible to what she was when

he proposed. You are an original couple, at all events."

"I wish Lord William would try sometimes," said Jacinth, playing with her fan. "I only devoutly wish I could be just like him and take interest in all his fads ; but I can't. I want a big house in Park Lane, to transplant Windyholme from the wilds of Dorsetshire to Berkshire, or some other accessible county ; I want to fill the house with a big shooting party, with people who'd ask us back, and with whom I should have something in common ; but instead, all the rooms, and we haven't many at Windyholme, are given over to people who have seen better days, and would not get a chance of an hour's sport anywhere else ; or to the lovely creatures you had a specimen of to-night, all mad about the regeneration of the lower classes and the repopulation of the country ; all as uninteresting, from a society point of view, as possible. No, when you bid me farewell in another week or two, you may be sure of this, you won't see me again ; for if I

don't die between this and February, I shall go mad. Even now I dream sometimes I am back at Windyholme. I hear the howl of the wind across the hills, and the dash of the rain against the window, and wake crying with rage and despair, and only rouse myself more fully to remember, with a shudder, that I am so many hours nearer to a place I utterly abhor. I shall be glad to see dear old Bob and the dogs again ; but I should be a thousand times more glad to see him here."

"He's doing some capital work for 'the Squire,'" said Mr. Seymour. "Why don't you take up your pen again, Lady William? It would give you something to live for; and if Courtenay and Dalrymple stay with you this autumn, news from the front always commands its price at our place; but, I suppose, money is no object now?"

Jacinth thought, with an uneasy twinge, of certain accounts that she would be very glad to know were settled and done with. "Those wretched women in the doorway don't look as if journalism paid well," she replied.

“You and they hardly stand on the same platform,” replied Mr. Seymour. “Your husband is a member of the advanced guard of the most advanced Parliament of the time. You hear all sorts of things which are worth a king’s ransom to a paper like ours, and your hand would be on the pulse of one of the most difficult counties in England. Watch the current for us. Note each straw impartially through your Conservative and your husband’s Liberal eyes, and let us have the result. There’s an interest in life for you at once, and a good £500 a year, if you are industrious. Then why don’t you write a novel? It may not live more than a few months, but while it does, life will be full of interest, and you can be always on the look-out for subjects for your next. Once your Windyholme neighbours know you write, they will be on their good behaviour for fear of the untoward fate that would overtake them if they were not.”

“I don’t want Windyholme or its people,” said Jacinth, wearily. “I want my London.”

“Yes; I know you do, but, as you can’t have it, why not make the best of what you already possess?” asked Mr. Seymour. “Take my advice, Lady William; make interests through your pen, and make money. A separate income is a power no woman can afford to throw away. Who knows when you may want it? Fads are expensive, and your dress is not picked up in Westbourne Grove.”

“Lord William would never forgive me,” said Jacinth.

“Don’t tell him. You won’t write; you will only inspire the *Wasps* articles,” said Mr. Seymour, easily. “As to the novel, steer clear of his pet aversions, and he will delight in that. I am sure you could write, Lady William, and the real novel of town and country society has yet to be given to the world. Why shouldn’t your book on the subject be as successful as Mrs Stephenson’s rattle of dead bones has been? By Jove!” he added, jumping up and blowing the whistle vigorously, “I forgot all about the

Stephenson's theatricals. There, before the herd rush in, tell me, will you go with me and my wife to the meeting of the Symposium on Thursday?"

"What is the Symposium?" asked Jacinth.

"A species of mutual admiration society for the lesser lights of journalism, well worth noting as one of the most curious developments of this curious age," replied Mr Seymour, carelessly. "Think over it, and let me know; Thursday, 9.30; early hours, but the members are all young and lovely, you know, and have to preserve themselves and their faculties for their *Work*"—with a ludicrous accent on the last word. Then, as people began to hurry down the avenues and dark forms began to seat themselves about the amphitheatre, Mr. Stephenson came back and took possession of Lady William, and remained by her side until the pastoral play was over and the busy pencils on every side had chronicled a full, true and particular account of another social success. Then the moon began to slide down over the trees; a far-off clock struck

an unearthly hour, and Jacinth, driving back alone to town—for Mr. Seymour had to rush to his office before returning to his house—thought quietly over the evening and wondered if she, too, could not make a literary success which should command attraction for her and make London a necessity to her, even in her husband's eyes. She should, of course, avoid the Scylla and Charybdis of the Society and women's journals, but Mr. Seymour should help her. Thank heaven! she could always rely on him; and, thinking of him and the manner in which a talk with him always seemed to lighten her troubles and inspire her with hope, she ran upstairs to her sleepy maid, and was soon asleep and dreaming dreams of a future in which Windyholme had no part; and which caused her to smile so sweetly, that when her husband came back from one of the late sittings provoked by the Irish Members, and which had turned the House into a pandemonium, and bent over her, he thanked God for his lovely wife, and wished more than ever that

they were at home at Windyholme together, his village plans matured, other State-made similar village settlements formed in all parts of the country, and his political career given up for one of perfect peace and contentment in his own house, among his own people ; a course which, if he had but reflected, he would have known would have driven the quiet sleeper by his side half mad with dulness and despair.

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## CHAPTER VI.

## A MEETING OF THE SYMPOSIUM.

A QUEER, rough envelope on Jacinth's plate at breakfast contained a still queerer scrap of parchment, on which was inscribed in mystical lettering the intimation that the members of the Symposium would meet at their rooms on the following Thursday, to hear the theory of beauty of motion explained to them by an Australian poetess ; and that Lady William Petersfield could avail herself of the privilege of being present, if she so desired ; and that the notice was sent by desire of Mr. and Mrs. Francis Seymour. The whole wording was so impertinently framed that Jacinth felt inclined to treat the paper as it deserved, when she suddenly remembered her promise to Mr. Seymour, and the fact that she was anxious to see for

herself all she could before she went back to her Dorset prison.

She was still regarding the parchment when her husband came in, his hands full of papers and his mind evidently occupied with their contents.

“More and more work for the village,” he exclaimed, brightly. “Oh! Jacinth, are you not broiled, and don’t you long for the country? If you were a wise child you’d pack up your boxes and be off to Windyholme. I must be here until the House rises, but I could run down constantly, and there’s no reason why you should stay. All the parties are over, and my mother leaves to-day, so there will be nothing going on.”

“There’s plenty going on, though the Duchess does go to Stradfield,” said Jacinth; “and nothing will take me to Windyholme until I am absolutely obliged. Why not close this flat, William, and take a little place on the river? we could breathe there, and yet should not be out of humanity’s reach.”

“Because I can’t afford three houses, and

because I mean to stop in town until I cannot work any more. I have a gigantic scheme in my head, evolved from the talk we had last night after you went off to the Stephenson's, and I believe we see our way to regenerating the unfortunate country and to bring back a population to the land, desolated by absenteeism and foolish farming."

"By free trade and fads," said Jacinth, her lip curling sarcastically. "Close the ports again and back comes prosperity."

"Aye, for the landowner, may be, and perhaps for the farmer," replied her husband, "but not for the people. Closing the ports means starvation for them. However, I never feel I can talk this over with you, dearest. Not only are you not interested in the poor, but I always dread your newspaper friends. In these days of gossip and publicity, nothing can mature properly. We cannot discuss anything, because our best friends may be among the scribblers. We are governed by newspapers nowadays, not by Her Majesty's Parliament, and the purveyors of

paragraphs, as hurtful to our cause as they are impertinent, may be at our elbows when we least expect it."

"And this is apropos of——?" asked Jacinth.

"Apropos of all those wretched papers you are so fond of," exclaimed Lord William. "Apropos of this, for example," and he handed her a copy of the *Wasp*, where a marked paragraph set forth in veiled, but easily understood language, Lord William's plans for the village, and referred in not very complimentary language to Utopian ideas held before by the Honourable Member for Barford, and which contained an allusion to "Our Greace," which Lord William, for one, could not but comprehend.

"I am sure Mr. Seymour never knew of this," exclaimed Jacinth.

"No; I don't think for a moment he did," said her husband, quietly, "or, peaceably inclined as I am, I should feel constrained to kick him; but that such a thing is possible speaks badly enough for our times. Now, I

have a scheme here I immensely want to discuss, but dare not do so for fear of the papers ; it would be ruin to the idea if a word got into print before I had consulted one or two Members of the Government. I wish you were a good Radical, Jacinth. A man and his wife should be one over politics."

"Not at all ; life would be terribly tame if they were ; tamer than it is," said Jacinth, with a yawn. "We'll agree to differ, William ; but please don't abuse my friends or the newspapers. It's you Radicals who began the free and unfettered discussion of everything in heaven and earth, and you have only yourselves to blame for the freedom of the Press. No ; as I remarked last night, Russia is about the only country left in the world where they still manage matters respectably. I do love a good despot."

Lord William laughed. "Unless the despot interfered with you," he said, "then your tone would be rather different, I expect. I should like to play the despot now, and send you off to Windyholme. My mother said yesterday

you were looking pale and worried, and that London didn't agree with you ; and by the way, Jacinth, she tells me that she met your sister out the other day, and that she said all kinds of rude things about you and the Seymours."

"Issy is capable of anything," said Jacinth, easily. "She is angry because I never ask them here, and I know she wants Mr. Seymour to go to their parties. She is as anxious to be noticed in the *Wasp* as you are to be ignored by that journal. She had better take care, for the *Wasp* can sting, as a great many people know already. Unless she lets me alone, I shall retaliate."

"My dear Jacinth," replied her husband, "one would think you edited the disgraceful little paper. Tell me about last night, and don't let us discuss the papers any more. I shall have to speak to Seymour about this, for if he can't control his staff better than this, he mustn't come here again ; but after that we need not mention them again. I've told the butler to counter-order the *Wasp* and

its satellites ; at all events, our house shall be sacred from such garbage as this," and Lord William tore the paper across and threw it into the waste-paper basket.

Jacinth said nothing. It was not worth while making a disturbance about a paper she could buy anywhere, whenever she went out, and she was clever enough to remain quiet when nothing was to be obtained by appearing put out. Presently she threw over the Symposium parchment to her husband. "You said all the parties were over; you see they are not," she remarked, rising from the table, and throwing the windows as wide open as they would go. "Oh! how hot it is, and how much hotter it is going to be. Let me order the Victoria and let us drive down to Richmond; or, better still, let us take the train to the sea and have a walk on the shore and the cliffs, and come back to supper, not dinner. How my soul loathes the idea of dinner such a day as this; and there's no need for it either. Let us enjoy ourselves, William; we have nothing else to do."

"I have, unfortunately, a great deal more to do ; and you forget, we dine at the Verulam's this evening, to meet that fellow who developed the village in Barnardshire," replied Lord William. "This afternoon I have to inspect a china manufactory, to see if something of the kind cannot be started in Fulbrook, and in an hour I am on a Committee, to say nothing of being due at the House itself for a short time. If you have no engagements, couldn't you call on the Sandersons? Snub Issy, if you like, but get some particulars from her husband about the spinning-wheels he told me of, and which he promised to have ready for me this week."

"I would rather die!" exclaimed Jacinth, fanning herself impetuously. "No ; Issy and July are rather too warm a combination for me. Do, for once, William, give up those wretched fads of yours, and let us enjoy ourselves. Think how lovely it is by the sea, and how hot and horrid it is here."

Lord William looked round at the room, at the flower-laden table, with its delicate



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accompaniments of fruit and ice, its cool matted floor, and its beautiful and artistic walls, and remembered with a shudder the houses he had seen but yesterday, the houses of those for whose emancipation he was working so desperately hard ; and going up to his wife, he put his arms round her and said fondly, " Jacinth, dearest, I can't. I grudge every moment I give to anything except my plans. Think of the awful rooms on such a day as this, that you don't like even to hear about ; think of the weak women and gasping children ; and then think of Fulbrook, the wind in the pines and the sound of the sea on the shore, and don't try to persuade me to put off for one day their salvation, their removal from the dirt and degradation of the one, to the blessed safety that the other would, must be. I must see Armitage early, and I must hear about the wooden houses they have used in Barnardshire ; and, in fact, I must remain where I am. I wish you were in Windyholme, little woman ; as it is, this is not quite such a bad spot, is it ? If you want

something to do, take Armitage's wife and that tall lanky girl of theirs to luncheon at Richmond. I don't believe Mrs. Armitage has been for a drive for years."

"Not since she bought her bonnet, I should say," remarked Jacinth, easily. "No, thank you, William; I have a reputation to keep up, and I feel sure I should be ill if I contemplated her, and Maude's legs and hat for more than ten minutes. Do, do get it out of your head that I am the least bit fond of doing good; and do please remember I have as much right to my husband as the dirty Whitechapel creatures. You never go with me anywhere now."

"I'll go with you here," replied Lord William, smiling, as he looked at the invitation, "and I could not possibly do anything I hated more. By the way, what is a Symposium?"

"The very question I asked Mr. Seymour last night," said Jacinth; "but I won't take you there. I am going with the Seymours, and as it's a regular horde of the newspaper

workers you detest so, I dare not take you lest murder should be done. I don't want you to go to the Symposium; I do want you to take me somewhere this broiling day."

"And that I can't do," replied her husband, gathering up his papers quickly; "and let this be your last excursion into Bohemia, Jacinth; it is worse and far more dangerous than slumming; and, dear, I don't like my wife to countenance these wretched scribblers. I hated your going to the Stephensons, knowing the class of person you'd meet. I dislike your going here even more, for the Stephensons are respectable—he is more than respectable—and Heaven alone knows who will be here. By the way, you haven't replied to this mandate, so there is time still to refuse; please me by doing so, dear."

"Not I," replied Jacinth, easily; "you won't give up your work to please me; I shall not give up my pleasure for you. That's only fair; besides, I told Mr. Seymour last night I'd go with him and Mrs. Seymour."

Lord William flushed. "We see rather

too much of the Seymours, I think," he said.

"If you had your way, we should see nothing but Whitechapel," replied Jacinth; "but if you won't leave your work, William, I shall not stay here and dispute. I must find someone to drive into the country with me, if only for an hour, so good-bye until dinner;" and airily kissing her hand to her husband, Jacinth ran upstairs to the drawing-room, where she quickly scribbled a line to one of her friends, begging her to be ready in half-an-hour for a long drive; and then, with a hasty sigh for the imaginary husband she would have had Lord William become, with his yacht at Cowes, and his four-in-hand ready for any amount of excursions, she dressed herself in one of her coolest dresses, which was as costly as it was cool, and set off in her luxurious carriage, intent on the enjoyment which was her one object in life.

Lord William, left alone in the dining-room, sighed deeply. At times he could not help wondering if he and his wife were quite as

happy as they ought to be, and if he could not give up some of his plans for her sake and devote himself to her instead of the poor. But when he contemplated the work before him, and to which he was only just apprenticed, as it were, the idea was impossible, and he contented himself with imagining that Jacinth must soon have her fill of gaiety, and would settle down into the useful helpmeet he had believed her to be when he saw her first, at the never-to-be-forgotten interview in Bevercombe wood. As he gathered up his books his eye fell on the invitation to the Symposium, and making a mental note of the date, he resolved that either Jacinth should stay at home or that he would accompany her. His mother had spoken of Mr. Seymour's continued presence at the Flat in a way she hardly ever allowed herself to speak, and had insinuated that Mrs. Sanderson might have grounds for what she had said; and though Lord William naturally did not think there was the very smallest degree of truth in Issy's ill-bred talk, that such talk was

possible was enough for him, and he resolved that for the future there should not be the smallest excuse for it.

Unfortunately, as the village scheme grew and gradually crystallised itself, Lord William found his time so full that he forgot everything else. The idea of cajoling back the population to country towns and districts not only commended itself to the Government, but members of the Opposition had quietly and patiently heard Lord William state his case; and gradually, under the fostering care of older, wiser Parliamentary hands than he was, a gigantic plan was developing itself, which engrossed each moment of his time, and demanded every atom of his thoughts, mind and brain; and though he felt as if all personal life ought to stand still until his plans were matured, he could not blame his wife for going her own way; while his work kept him so busy, he often had not a moment for his dinner, and had about one-half the quantity of sleep that he ought to have had. Naturally enough, Jacinth resented

the silence her husband maintained on the subject of his schemes, and though she pretended both to him and to herself that she took no interest in fads, and had no sympathy with that "daughter of the horse-leech," the poor, with its continual cry "Give, give," she resented deeply a silence she could not help attributing to Lord William's dread of her newspaper friends, and his abhorrence of the paragraphists, who remorselessly dogged his footsteps whenever he appeared in any public place.

When the evening sacred to the Symposium gathering came round, Lady William contented herself by a simple statement of her destination, when her carriage and the Seymours were announced together; and Lord William could do nothing but greet the Seymours politely, the while he felt inclined to use bad language over the fact that he had utterly forgotten all about it, and was only waiting for Mr. Armitage to go out collecting some information about the subject of his thoughts and cares, and

could, therefore, not accompany them ; and he did not look his pleasantest when he stood at the carriage door, bidding his guests farewell, and counselling his wife not to remain too long ; which caused Mr. Seymour to say, with a laugh, "Lord William evidently thinks we are taking you into the haunts of vice. I fear he is as prejudiced against these writers as he is against our unfortunate newspapers."

"And he is quite right, too," said Mrs. Seymour, quietly. "I often wish we were respectable, Francis, and did not hanker after news at any price in the way we do, or, rather, in the manner in which you do. I never feel, nowadays, as if I could go anywhere with a clear conscience."

"Don't talk nonsense, my dear," exclaimed Mr. Seymour. "If your conscience troubles you, you can console yourself with the idea that it is not half as annoying as unpaid butchers and bakers clamouring at our door can be. You make no money, but your connection with the swells allows me to know



of what is going to be quite twelve hours in advance of anyone else, and, in consequence, the *Wasp* is a power, and one that coins money. Those brats of yours will never have to work as I have done ; never have to throw away all their fairest prospects as I had to, because I was unprovided with the sinews of war," and Mr. Seymour looked meaningly at Jacinth, whose foolish heart beat quicker, and her face flushed, as once more she contrasted the man she had married with the man her Bohemian soul confessed she had never ceased to love. Albeit, at times her nobler self confessed, equally truthfully, that there was a vulgar side to his character that repelled her, despite the affection she cherished for her old sweetheart, and which had never appeared to her before her association with her husband.

Before she could speak the carriage drew up at the entrance of the house, lent for the evening to the Committee of the Symposium and in five minutes Jacinth found herself among the queerest selection of folks she

had ever met, even in London. Though the *Æsthetics* are popularly supposed to have vanished, when their hero became unromantically stout, and cut his hair and extravagancies of costume at the same time, they exist still. True, their eccentricities do not publicly obtrude themselves as they were wont to do, but at the Symposium and in kindred spots they flourish exceedingly, and make up in dirt what they lack in distinction. Poverty has made many of them her own, and a smock, sack-like in make and guiltless of style, yet æsthetic in colour and singular in design, is too precious a garb to the impecunious ones of this earth to be given up without something more than a mere falling-off of supporters, and therefore many of the lesser literary lights feminine still cling to the costume that was once the most fashionable thing possible, even in the highest circles.

Mrs. Seymour, quiet and unobtrusive as she was, was yet in demand, and was soon separated from her husband and Jacinth,

and they strolled round the rooms alone, looking at the pictures and flowers, which were supposed to be the object of the gathering. At last Mr. Seymour said, "I have brought my wife up well, have I not, Lady William? She must make herself pleasant for me, while I look on. It would never do for me to be on too familiar terms with these people; and yet one never knows when they may be useful. In consequence, Flora does the agreeable, acts the jackal, while I monopolise the lion's share. Heavens! how I wish I were rich, out of all this miserable sham literary society, and able to live the life I would have had! We are all wrongly sorted, Jacinth. I wonder if, in another world, things will be put straight for us."

"Another world!" said a deep voice at Jacinth's back. "Who is talking of that feeble superstition? Not you, Mr. Seymour, surely? Oh! it is sad to hear one of us using the old shibboleths and clinging to the old superstitions—one of us, who has had a

wider sphere of action, and seen more and done more in five minutes than in the old days was seen and done in a lifetime; but perhaps your companion is new to our set, and you were speaking simple words for her sake?" and the speaker, a ponderous lady in rusty velvet and short gray locks, laid her ungloved hand on Mr. Seymour's arm and gazed at him and his companion in a way that any other society would have called rude, but that was considered quite the thing at the meetings of the Symposium.

Mr. Seymour looked annoyed, but perforce he introduced Lady William Petersfield to Mrs. Laura Spedding—a name that suggested nothing to Jacinth, but of which the owner appeared to be remarkably proud—and seemed to await some recognition from Lady William; however, as none came, and as Jacinth simply haughtily bowed her head and would not see the large-veined hand that bore a huge and mystic seal ring on the centre finger, Mrs. Spedding remarked; "What is your line, Lady Petersfield?"

"Lady William Petersfield," said Mr. Seymour.

"Well; it don't matter," exclaimed Mrs. Spedding, sharply; "there are no more present of the family. I only want to know what her ladyship's done? I don't seem to remember her name."

"I have done nothing—if you mean have I written a book or painted a picture," replied Jacinth. "May I ask, in return, if you are equally guiltless?"

Mrs. Spedding gasped; but before she could reply, Mr. Seymour said, lightly: "Not to know Laura Spedding, Lady William, augurs yourself unknown. Her last book made a tremendous sensation, and has certainly caused the Church militant to try on its armour and make ready for the fight for the loaves and fishes. Disestablishment and disendowment are within appreciable distances; and, in fact, the Archbishop of Canterbury was made sleepless for a month after he read 'War to the Knife: Down with the Churches.' Mrs. Spedding is anxious to

hasten the millenium, when there shall be no priests or temples to stand between us and daylight. If you had not lived in the wilds of Dorset, you must have heard of her ;” and Mr. Seymour smiled at Mrs. Spedding, who was fortunately greeted at that moment by a friend who, being gifted herself, strewed incense liberally at Mrs. Spedding’s shrine, being quite sure that an equal amount would be returned her at the earliest opportunity.

“ Are they all as awful as that—as awful as they look—and have they all done something ?” asked Jacinth, as she seated herself on a low sofa in an alcove and waved her feather fan languidly. “ I feel quite exhausted with looking at them. How can you bear to be associated with such a crew ?” and she looked up at Francis Seymour, who was gnawing his moustache and glancing superciliously at the tangled grimy crowd around him.

“ I cannot bear it, but I must,” he muttered ; “ at least, until my fortune is made and I can cut myself adrift from the whole lot. Look at those women with their note-books, purring,

prying, sniffing at each other's dresses ! Well, there's not one of them who would not sell her dearest friend's most sacred secrets if they were marketable. There's no act they won't do to ferret out a bit of negotiable news, and no 'deed too paltry they won't perform if they can make anything by it ; and they quarrel and fight over materials for their different paragraphs and articles like dogs fighting for some choice morsel of garbage. Ah ! I know what you're thinking," he added, bitterly. " I do live by society journalism, and those harpies help me to live ; still, I can despise the whole lot as heartily as does your husband, and I can feel my own degradation as keenly as if I stood outside the whole thing. When I remember the old literary days, when men wrote books, when the *Times* swayed the destinies of nations, and contrast it with the papers of to-day, with its shrieking crowd of women journalists and its crew of novel-writing school-girls ; its female promulgators of unbelief, and discussions of subjects that formerly it was

a shame to think of, I feel like killing the *Wasp* and trying Australia ; but even those remote regions are remote no more, and there is no spot upon earth where the struggle for existence does not make garbage hunters and social spies of us all."

"You should try Dorsetshire, and one of my husband's industrial villages," said Jacinth, "if you really mean what you say."

"But I don't. I feel it all, and know exactly where I stand," replied Mr. Seymour ; "yet how long could I exist away from the turmoil or from the rush and stir of my London ? It is bad, false, and feverish, but it is my life, and had I millions, I should pine for the weekly excitement of my own paper, and the daily excitement of the hunt for news ; and, talking of news, there is one thing I want of you," and Mr. Seymour leant closer to Jacinth and spoke low in her ear. "I want you to find out how the Opposition means to behave about this new bill of your husband's, and I want the text of that bill the moment it is drafted for the printers. Such information



as that is worth more money to me than you can think ; if I had it before the *Times* it would make my fortune ; but that's the worst of you ; you're a rich woman and don't want money. Now Laura Spedding would jump at it."

Jacynth thought of her unpaid bills and her husband's inflexible determination to keep his expenses within a certain limit with a shudder, but at last she said, "My husband gives me no opportunity of learning his plans ; he is far too afraid of all my newspaper friends, as he calls them ; besides, I should hardly be likely to betray his confidence to you or anyone else."

"You have been very useful to the paper and to me," said Mr. Seymour, carelessly, "but it would, of course, not be fair to ask you to spoil sport now, particularly if you are in favour of this scheme of his for the nationalization of the land ; if that becomes law you and Dorsetshire will see a great deal of each other, as one of the vital points is that the owner of the soil should live on it and act

Providence to his tenants. No London then, Lady William, no theatres, no dances, nothing but fog and misery and dulness. Sunday schools, tea-fights, blankets, and all the other signs of a Lady Bountiful will engross you, and make you their own. Your dreams of being a leader of fashion will all fade away, like the mists round Windyholme when a September sun rises and chases them off; and I shall hear of you going down to an honoured grave, worn out by your labours in the cause of the villager, who won't be even grateful, as your husband's scheme eliminates the cheerful public-house from the scene, and provides only the virtuous and dull coffee-tavern instead."

"You seem to know a great deal about Lord William's plans, already," said Jacinth, flushing.

"I only know what he has told us himself, and that, as you know, is not much," said Mr. Seymour, carelessly. "There's a very great deal more I am pining to learn; but I am not going to tempt you to join the ranks

I have just been condemning. I simply put out a suggestion to you, and leave it to you to do as you like in the matter. Only, remember, I shall be more than grateful for any hints you can give me."

"Talking of the paper reminds me of that paragraph in the *Wasp* last week," said Jacinth. "What did it mean?"

"Have you never heard of 'Our Greace?' " asked Mr. Seymour, laughing. "Well, if you have not, it is not for me to tell you. Ask Lord William. It is a most amusing story, and one that half the world knows; so I am sure he won't mind you hearing all about it, more especially as the lady is now married and settled in her own especial rank of life, which was not a very exalted one. However, don't speak of that paragraph; had I seen it, it never would have been published; but as it came from one of your personal friends, I suppose it crept in when my sub.'s back was turned. What did Lord William say, I wonder?"

"He was not very polite, either to you or

the paper," replied Jacinth; "and as he has forbidden the latter the house, you can imagine how pleased he would be were I to give you any information about his bill. But how we are wasting our opportunities, Mr. Seymour. Here are we, surrounded by half the celebrities in London, and we are not even looking at them. See! who is that singular fat-faced boy, with the ancient female with the tangled head?"

"Ah! let them alone," said Mr. Seymour, carelessly, "and let us talk. It is not often we can have five minutes' conversation, and those people are anything but celebrities, or else they would not be here. This is a Mutual Admiration Society, Lady William, a species of 'I ca' thee and you ca' me' gathering, and there isn't a soul here who has ever done or said anything that has penetrated beyond a gathering of the Symposium."

"And yet you are here," said Jacinth.

"Yes, because it is my *metier*," replied Francis Seymour, bitterly. "My dreams of advancement are all over, swamped among

nursery blankets and the necessity of making money. If I had had an ambitious, clever wife, one of whom I were proud, and who was proud of me, how different my life would have been; and, Jacinth," he added, lowering his voice and drawing nearer to her, "I cannot help thinking you too regret Dorsetshire and the chances you have thrown away."

"I regret nothing, and have thrown nothing away," said Jacinth, proudly. "Come, Mr. Seymour, forget my Christian name for the future, and now let us walk about. I promised Lord William that I would be early, and I really want to see the people, to say nothing of the pictures;" and, so saying, Lady William rose, and in a very short time she and the Seymours were driving home, having found that a little of the company of the Symposium people went a very long way.

## CHAPTER VII.

## LORD WILLIAM'S BILL.

AS the hot July days went on, Jacinth began to think that she could never hold out until the Session was over. It was years since she had been in London so late in the season, and she thought regretfully of Barbara's bare parlour and the scented steeps of Bevercombe wood every morning when she rose from her uneasy couch, and every night when she wooed sleep in the bedroom that no amount of shading and open windows could prevent from becoming like the Black Hole of Calcutta.

If Jacinth drove, the dusty streets were redolent of cabbage stalks and over-ripe fruit, which, heaped on open barrows, and sweltering in the sun, unpleasantly suggested cholera and all kinds of diseases ; while the newspaper-covered windows and the gasping,

dying flowers in the window-boxes told their own story of distant owners and neglectful caretakers in a manner which would have depressed the most lively soul. While, if she walked, her fashionable attire contrasted so forcibly with that of the folks she met, and attracted so much attention, and the heat and dust were so intense, she always vowed that no power on earth would induce her to set her foot outside her own door until that joyful occasion when, Parliament risen, she could return to her despised Dorset home, which never appeared fairer than when she remembered how the hot sun, which was scorching her in London, would there be shining down through the dense green silence of the July woods, and how the soft lap-lap of the sea on the shore in the tiny cove would be sounding coolly and pleasantly in the distance, giving a sense of freshness to the very hottest day possible.

Lord William, engrossed by his bill and the thousand and one schemes which filled his head, did not even remember that August

was nearing, and though he perpetually urged Jacinth to accept his mother's often-repeated invitation to Stradfield, he was really too much in love still with his wife to voluntarily deprive himself of the pleasure of seeing her at his hastily-eaten meals, and of knowing she was in the house when he returned late at night to snatch the small amount of sleep which he allowed himself, and, in consequence, did not insist on her leaving London in the way he would have done had he not been so tremendously busy with his new schemes.

Modelled on the idea of the Toynbee settlement in the East-end, Lord William's plan for the redemption of the country began to be something more than a mere idea. The ground round Windyholme produced a remarkably fine white clay, and this he intended to turn into china without sending it off to the distant Staffordshire potteries in the manner in which it had always been disposed of, and he had already started the building, under the superintendence of a man on whom he implicitly relied to manage the



starved-out builders and painters sent down fresh from the turmoil and rush of the great city ; while round the base of Carbarrow clustered already a group of wooden houses which was to be the nucleus of an industrial village : the future model of those villages which should woo back into the deserted and beautiful country those who were crushed out of existence, or stirred into rebellion against God and man, by the fearful contrasts between rich and poor, which are never so intense as they are in a large town where work is scant and mouths are many.

Lord William, with his hand on the pulse of the age, began to understand life better than he had ever done before.

At first, Socialist of the Socialists, he was eager to share all he had indiscriminately ; but, made wiser by time and age, he now understood that true Socialism is best expressed in faithful stewardship, and that the good he meant to do could only be carried through by a calm mind and a steady head ; while he administered, for the benefit

of the many, the fortune that would have been as nothing, once it was given up to the clamorous Socialist, who generally is he who will not work himself, and only requires to snatch what he resolutely refuses to earn for himself.

The dismal problem of uncultivated acres, of unlet farms, and lessened incomes, to say nothing of depopulated towns and villages, which some of the Opposition fondly hoped to solve by returning to the days of closed ports and fettered trade, inclined the other side of the House to listen calmly, if not kindly, to Lord William's plans and schemes. Their one idea had been knocked on the head by a declaration from their leader that a return to the good old days of prosperity for the farmer and landowner, and starvation for the masses, would cause a revolution, and he for one would never countenance it ; and, in consequence, learned heads and proud hearts, steeled hitherto against the cry of the poor, were opened to hear Lord William, and some of the most pig-headed went down to Windyholme and actually inspected the

village, and came away wondering whether, after all, there might not be something in the notion of nationalizing the land, and settling once more the empty villages and towns with those whose hands were ready to work, but for whom no work was apparently to be found.

Of course the Talbots, and, indeed, all the inhabitants of the Fulbrook district, were in arms against the Petersfield faction.

Too much of the old school to understand that the venerable proverb, "He who will not work, neither shall he eat," could possibly apply to county families, who were not born to soil their fingers by earning money; and, in fact, only existed in a species of small heaven of their own, where the daily worship of their curtseying, front-lock pulling tenants, was as the very breath of their nostrils: they shrieked in concert against Lord William's villainy, and drove round to each other's houses, and called on all the voters in Barford, in a sheer agony of fright, lest what they so detested should become law, and they should be obliged either to cultivate

the immense tracts of land fast going back into desolate waste, or to sell them to those who were ready and willing to do so, could they have reasonable security for their money.

That Fulbrook—respectable, beautiful, peaceful Fulbrook—should have inhabitants from the worst parts of London, seemed an outrage that stirred the district to its very depths; but, unfortunately for the Talbots, stirred many of the most influential voters in an entirely different direction to the one they had hoped they would take.

Already the small dairy farmers found a ready market for their eggs, milk, and poultry; and as a great many things were now required in Barford, instead of the mere dribble ordered by the "County" when their ready-money was exhausted and the "Stores" were closed to them, even Barford was rebellious, and began to say openly that Lord William was the sort of Member they liked, and be hanged if they would vote against him or his set, come the election when it might.

Naturally, the faster the village and the new

pottery grew, the quicker Lord William's money went away from his wife, and the more he spent on his "fads," as Jacinth contemptuously called his plans and ideas, the more she rebelled against the wasting of his income, and her enforced economy galled her to the quick.

Already her own debts began to give her some trouble ; but, of course, tradespeople were not anxious to press anyone in Lady William's position, and with Lady William's husband's income, and though unpleasant little reminders of her more unpleasant position began to reach her by almost every post, there was yet no urgent reason for confessing to her husband how foolishly she had managed, and in what a terrible mess she was ; and, indeed, any ideas of confession were nipped in the bud by Lord William's emphatic commendation of the course of conduct pursued by a friend, who, rather than pay an exorbitant milliner's bill, had fought the case in open Court, as much to show the world that he did not intend to be ruined by an extravagant woman, as to punish a tradeswoman whose

charges pre-supposed a certain amount of waiting for her money ; and, in consequence, Jacinth felt that before her lay nothing but an arid waste of economy in Dorsetshire, the while the money that might have made her so happy was squandered daily on a set of people who would have been quite as happy grubbing and starving in Whitechapel, as they would be among the wilds and wastes of the heathery hills of Fulbrook.

Slowly, but surely, husband and wife were drifting more and more apart. Slowly, but surely, Jacinth began to think regretfully of the entertaining Bohemian life, the entire sympathy she would have had, had she married her first love and settled down to the amusing, exciting existence, which was as the very breath of her life, and which she shared whenever she could do so without attracting comment ; and Lord William would have been more than astonished had he known how Jacinth spent her days, once she became resigned to the absence of the "world," and recognised that London in August has attractions,

particularly to those whose work goes on despite the limits of the season, and who are cognisant of the thousand and one excursions which can be made, despite the browning trees and the fainting flowers which make the parks a dreary desert, and seem to hurry on the autumn in a most tiresome manner.

Piloted by Francis Seymour, and one of a company, all of whom were more or less attached to the *Wasp* and to kindred, if smaller, journals, Jacinth was soon *au fait* with all sorts and conditions of places round about London; and while Lord William was at the House, or travelling hither and thither to collect information about pottery, weaving, paper manufacturing, and cottage farming, and, indeed, on every subject under the sun, Jacinth was equally busy killing time, and becoming more and more one of a set her husband abhorred from his soul, and with whom he would never for one moment allow her to have anything in common had he had his eyes opened, and had he not been so much engrossed. At last, one day, the last

Irish obstructionist had been quelled, and the House received intimation of the date of its rising, and Lord William came home thoroughly exhausted and threw himself down on the sofa in the cool matted drawing-room. Jacinth was drawing off her gloves, having tossed her be-feathered hat into an arm chair, where the small brown dog, Lord William's constant companion, had already curled himself up with that sense of undisturbed possession shown by any animal who resides where his or her rights are properly respected, and when she saw her husband come in she said carelessly, "You are home early."

"Yes," he answered cheerfully; "and soon I shall be going home for good. The House rises on Wednesday, and then hey for home and the cool, green slopes of our hills. Don't you long to be off and away, eh, Jacinth?"

"Not I," said Jacinth, as she made the small dog sit up on his reluctant hind legs, and tried her hat on him. "I loathe Dorsetshire and everyone belonging to it. Can't you come abroad, William, and let me see a little of



the world? I don't think it is too late even now for Switzerland, and I am positively pining to see something beyond our corner of the globe. Couldn't you manage a trip to New York? With your income, and no encumbrances, we might see the whole world; and you speak of Dorsetshire!"

"You forget the village," replied her husband, drawing a weighty roll of papers from his pocket, "and you forget Bob. Thank Heaven, he is going to leave Bevercombe as soon as he can, and look after the village for me. The dogs will thrive at Windyholme, and you and Barbara can look after the schools just as you used to do before you were married. Jacinth, you'll be so busy soon, you will not have a dull moment. New York! Only think of the new life we are giving to dozens of people, and that we shall give to millions, once my bill passes the House and becomes law, and don't mention anything else until that is all settled and the village is a shining example for the rest of England to follow. Look here, Jacinth! here are the new plans

for the schools. See, here the boys will learn their trades, and here the girls will be taught cooking and dressmaking and all feminine arts, and here will be the big swimming-bath;" and sitting up, Lord William unfolded the plans, and Jacinth, tired of inducing Snuff to go through his tricks, came over to her husband and looked carelessly at the big open map, which lay on his knees.

"But surely," said she, after a moment's pause, "that bath comes almost where I want the new coach-house and stables?"

"There's no money left for them," answered Lord William, carelessly. "I shall never want to keep more horses than we have, and the coach-house is more than big enough for our carriages. No! Jacinth, when we were engaged I told you what I intended to do with my life, and you married me with your eyes open, dearest. You must not blame me if I do not change now. Can't you be one with me, love? Can't you be interested in my work?" he added, as he looked up and saw her flushed and angry face. "I can

assure you that you would soon become as infatuated about the village as I am, and you would be as ready to work for it, as ever I am, once you understood how much we were going to do for our country and for future generations. See here, Jacinth; you remember the cove? Well——”

“Don’t tell me any more about the place,” said Jacinth, angrily. “When I married you I did not expect to have to qualify for a species of workhouse superintendent. Anyhow, William, now we are on the subject, let us understand each other fully. I resent, emphatically resent, the whole of your life and the best part of your income being wasted on these wretches, who will take all you give and will, no doubt, turn and rend you at the earliest opportunity. If you persist in ruining yourself and Fulbrook, to say nothing of Windyholme and my social position, understand, once and for all, that I will not countenance you in your proceedings. You must go your way and I will go mine. You can depend on paupers and villagers for

your society ; I will have my friends and be independent of you. Why do you persist in your stupid fads ? ” she added. “ We could be so happy together, and yet you allow these creatures to come between us,” and she snatched the plans out of Lord William’s hands, and threw them indignantly on the floor.

“ My dear Jacinth,” exclaimed her husband, rising and gathering up the papers. “ How can you behave so like a naughty baby ? It is impossible for a husband and wife to exist in the eminently idiotic way you propose. In the first place, were I even disposed to allow it, how do you mean to begin going your own way ? One house must hold us. You must give me my breakfast and dinner, and see my house is properly managed, and you must come to me for all you want. Even if I did not love you, and look forward to the few hours I can spend with my little wife as the reward of all my toil, I do not see how you are to cease fulfilling your part of the marriage contract. But don’t let us waste time on such nonsense. You love me and I

love you, and you are bound to help me all you can, more especially as I don't condemn you to poverty, as some enthusiast might, but keep you in lovely clothes and a pretty house. Come, Jacinth, help me with some of your clever suggestions, and only think of the lovely rides we shall be having this time next week. Why, London will seem like a bad dream once we are among the pine-trees and heather again," and Lord William put his arm round his wife's waist and drew her down to his side on the sofa; which act caused Snuff to close the one eye he had kept open, and to sink into the deep slumber he did not dare go in for as long as his companions looked as if they were on the point of war.

Jacinth sat down and allowed her husband to draw her to him. She saw the force of his argument. It was impossible to refuse to help him as long as she wore her marriage ring and felt the weight of her marriage bonds. If she behaved in the manner she proposed, she had sense enough to see that her husband would recognise that he must assert his authority at once,

and knew that he would do so, and that would probably result in circumstances being even more unpleasant than they were at present. If she left him, she had nowhere to go and no money on which to rely; and she was too proud of her position—had too lively a remembrance of her Bevercombe prison—to voluntarily bring on her head Lord William's displeasure, or her own destruction by her foolishness.

“How I hate being married,” she exclaimed, petulantly. “I wish you'd bring in a bill for the reform of the marriage laws. One ought to have a twelve months' apprenticeship to the life and be able to throw it up at the end, if one found it impossible to fulfil all the conditions. Here are we, tied for life, and both of us as unfitted for each other as we can be. I am a butterfly; you a busy bee. I can't for the life of me think why you married me; for there never were two people less alike than we are.”

“I married you because I loved you,” said Lord William, quietly. “I am quite satisfied with my twelve months' apprenticeship to

matrimony, and would not throw up my indentures for all the world. In time you will understand how poor a thing you are making of your life by thinking of nothing but gaiety, dearest. You have too much in you—too much sense—not to recognise that life means something more than mere enjoyment. Besides, you love me.”

“I am not sure that I know what love is.” said Jacinth, slowly. I believe the whole of my life is changed. I have always been just outside everything ; just outside the rapture of love ; just outside enjoyment. I should have had a life worth living if my father had behaved himself decently ; as it is, I am miserable, and don't know how to make my life any better.”

“You are hipped and run down by so much London,” replied her husband, stroking her hair and drawing her head down on his shoulder. “I am quite satisfied with your love, and all I want is that you should take a little more interest in my plans. Once my bill is passed ; indeed, once my own village is in regular working order, my little wife will

have her hands full, entertaining the swells who will be coming down perpetually to see how we are getting on and to copy our endeavours. Can you not understand what it will all bring about, Jacinth? Oh! if you could only see the sweaters' dens and the awful lodging-houses from which I have already rescued those who were born and bred in the sweet pure country, and came up to town with the fixed idea that the streets were paved with gold, you would be as enthusiastic as I am; but I am sure you have had enough of London now, and I am looking forward more than I can say to talking over my plans with you, away from town and your friends the Seymours. I dread that man. It would be death to my bill if the newspapers got hold of it before the time."

"Do you mean it would stop the whole scheme?" asked Jacinth.

"No; oh, no!" replied Lord William; "but it might be seriously hampered and hindered if the Lords learned all we mean to ask before our demands go up to them, backed by such



a majority in the House that they dare not reject us; however, there is no chance of that. There are only three of us in the secret, and by the time the bill is printed the House will be sitting, and then—but I hardly like to think of then, lest I should be disappointed.”

“Why can't you be like the Duke?” asked Jacinth, impatiently. “Enjoy yourself frankly, and not bother your head about the people.”

“Would you be surprised to hear that the Duke is in favour of my scheme, or as much of it as he knows?” replied her husband. “He has eight excellent reasons for backing me up; for, once carried, my bill will enable him to provide for as many little maidens as he likes to have. As it is, were he to die, I should step into his shoes at once, as you know, and the girls would have very little, poor things. At least, I should pity them; only I really think they would be all the happier were they not in the least attractive to any fortune hunter who makes love to them for the *beaux-yeux* of their money-boxes far more than for themselves.”

“I do think sometimes you are cracked.” remarked Jacinth; “why you are entirely different to all the world I can’t think. I believe if it rested with you, you would not allow anyone to exist without a regular course of hard labour, and as to enjoying yourself I am certain you think amusement criminal. You should have married Caroline Morphew, William; one new ulster a year, three pairs of thick boots, made in the village under her own eyes, and a waterproof hat, and perhaps a new dorcas basket, and nothing more would have been required of you; certainly you would not have had any upholsterers’ bills; she thinks it sinful to sleep on anything softer than sacking. You missed a great chance of a suitable help-meet when you left her to languish in single blessedness,” and Jacinth took up her hat and gloves and went to the window to look out at the river and the slowly passing barges.

Even the river looked unhappy under the broiling sun, which gleamed on the dull, calm surface as if it were anxious to cool itself in the slowly moving tide; and across the water

the trees were already becoming brown and sere, and the grass looked as if a fire had passed over it and entirely obliterated every trace of verdure.

Jacinth seated herself on the window-sill by the covered balcony among her flowers, and gazed into the dusty odoriferous street below her and at the few passers by. Every now and then a heavily laden cab groaned by, bringing back some tradesman's wife and family to the fly haunted regions behind their shops from their short change at Margate; and far away a melancholy organ wailed out some popular comic song, but so slowly and drearily it might well have been a psalm tune or the latest methodist hymn for all the resemblance it had to its original; and as Jacinth looked down dreamily an unspeakable feeling of sorrow seized her, and she began to feel as if her whole life were a mistake, and she was unable to rescue herself from a state of either despair or dulness.

Presently she looked back into the room. Her husband had fallen asleep on the sofa,

his dusty boots on her pet piece of Japanese embroidery, and her favourite new silk pillow beaten and pulled out of shape under his head. She quietly rose and stood by him, looking down at him and trying to understand in what light she really regarded him. The little brown dog opened one sleepy eye and wagged his stumpy tail against the chair when he heard her return; but her husband never moved, and lay sunk in heavy slumber. All at once the idea struck her that he might be dead, and at the mere belief that such a thing was possible her heart beat wildly with an undefined feeling, half of relief, half of horror. Dead! Then she would be free; free to do as she liked, to know whom she liked, to entertain royally, and, in time, to be the first object of interest in some future season. Free of what? Then horror seized her at herself and her own selfishness and badly developed disposition, and she sank down on her knees gently, and once more looked at Lord William. As she did so, she remembered her old life at her father's house more vividly than she

had ever done before. She recollected her gay and delightful girlhood; her adoration and belief in her father; and her joyous anticipations of what the world would prove to be, once she was within its charmed circles. True, she had had her trials. Issy's superiority, and her positive conviction that 9.30 was the hour at which all good girls should go to bed, when they were still doing lessons, had embittered her life. The fact that her dresses were kept above the tops of her boots, and that the first man who admired her at a dance her father had surreptitiously taken her to, faltered in his allegiance when he discovered this, and that his lovely partner of the night before was a mere bread-and-butter miss, had given her positive agony; but then she knew, too, these were mere passing pin-pricks, all to be forgotten once she was out of Issy's and the Fraulein's clutches. And as she pondered, she recollected bitterly how positively she had believed in the goodness and beauty of the beautiful world, and the purity and truth of every man and woman in it.

The blow which struck down her home, and spoiled her life, had shattered every atom of faith she possessed. If her father could fail her ; if he, the generous patron of art and science, was an impostor—a thief—then for her should all the world be as he was ; and without one struggle she allowed all to go by the board, and began her second life, embittered and soured, determined only to take as much as she could get from those who would, she was convinced, rob her, if she did not forestall them in their attempts. Then came the quiet life at Bevercombe, where the contemplation of Bob's honest life and Barbara's unselfish devotion, almost bore her back ; but as she contrasted them with the clergy round, and recognised how Bob was treated, her heart hardened again, against all but her own immediate circle, and she believed in no one. Then came Lord William, her short wooing, her married life. Reviewing that, as she sat by him, she could find no fault, save in herself and in her dislike to what he lived for, and in her preference for the society

of Mr. Seymour and his friends to that of her husband and his. Again a wave of colour flushed over her face. Why did she care for this man? She knew how unworthy he was; how utterly inferior he was to Lord William. But the touch of his hand, the mere tone of his voice, stirred her as nothing else could, and his soul dominated hers as if he had used mesmeric influence over her.

As Jacinth recognised all this, she once more looked at her sleeping husband. She could do so quite calmly, her heart did not beat one atom faster, her pulse did not quicken in the least as she looked down at him, his tired face, his untidy garments, and his careless attitude, and she could not help wondering what life would be like with his money and position combined with Francis Seymour, and all his interest in life and people and society. The cynical proverb that declares perfect married life impossible, and that lays down as an axiom, that there is always one who kisses and the other that contents itself with holding out a cheek, came to her

remembrance, and she smiled sadly as she stood.

“It’s no use fighting against fate,” she thought; “after all, if he would relinquish his fads and travel, life would be worth having. Who knows, if the bill is thrown out, whether he won’t give all up? Anyhow, I will do my best to thwart him, as much for myself as for the good of the country, which is being imperilled as Mr. Seymour says, by these miserable faddists,” and shrugging her shoulders impatiently, Jacinth went up to dress for dinner, leaving her husband sleeping the sleep of a tired-out enthusiast, and dreaming of happy days to come, when England should be restored to its old standing of an example of rural felicity, and when the landlords and profit-mongers of the sweaters’ dens and the ghastly lodging-houses in the slums should meet the punishment they so richly deserved, little thinking that his nearest and dearest would, if she could, disperse his dreams as easily as she could blow aside an autumnal cobweb stretched across her path.



## CHAPTER VIII.

## LADY WILLIAM'S BILLS.

ONCE back at Windyholme, Jacinth could hardly believe that she had ever been away, and even as she drove through Barford on her way home, and noticed the sleepy little town, and caught the same eyes watching her advent which had noticed her departure, looking over the wire blinds in the doctor's and lawyer's houses, she could not help feeling distinctly melancholy, as she realized that she and London would have nothing to say to each other for many months, and that she was as far away from all its fascinations now as ever she had been in the Bevercombe days.

And yet Fulbrook and the beautiful hills had never looked more lovely, for were they not glowing in the sunset, and covered with

their pink heather and dull gold French furze autumnal robe? And as Carbarrow was passed, and the horses paused for a moment after the stiff climb to the summit of the longest hill in Dorsetshire, Lord William gave a cry of delight, faintly echoed by his wife, when the sea, the marvellous blue, silent sea, was once more visible, and they could look across the last range of hills to its wide-spreading plain, and note the long cloudy island of Portland on the left, and the glittering Isle of Wight on the right, in an "arrangement of colour" that would have inspired an artist, or caused a poet to sing aloud for joy.

"Can't you feel the Fulbrook spell?" asked Lord William, enthusiastically, as, after the horses had regained their breath, they started forward and rapidly descended towards the pine-encircled house. "Are you not in your secret heart fond of this dear old county? I grant we are not lovely to people who do not really know us, but once learn us thoroughly and we cast a glamour over our

visitors which they never escape. The mere scent of the turf burning over there, the mere sight of my own purple hills, and the sound of the sea, are enough to inspire me to deeds of valour, and I can't help thinking you must love home as much as I do."

At that moment the bells from the village church on the height began to peal; now they rang loudly down the valley; now again the light south-west wind—never absent even in the hottest weather from that windy district—caught the sound and carried it away out to sea; then a louder peal of jubilant melody burst on the ear, and the air seemed full of the joyous clang and chime.

"Our welcome home!" exclaimed Lord William, his cheek flushing; and taking his wife's hand he pressed it tenderly. "You must be glad, Jacinth; even the ringers have turned out, and I feel like a bridegroom once more. Only think what our living among our own people means, dear. It is good to live in a place where our very home-coming causes such a welcome as the bells give us.

Now, in London who is the wiser, who is the better for our actions? while here——”

“While here, the ringers, no doubt, have already discounted your sovereign,” interrupted Jacinth, cynically. “No, William, neither here nor elsewhere are we welcomed, except for what we bring, for what people can get out of us. Don’t make any mistake about my detestation for this place, pray. I hate the country, except for a change; except as a place where I can get up my strength and recoup bodily and mentally, and financially, too, for the season’s outlay; but when you ask me to go into hysterics of joy over this dreary place, and over the spasmodic ringing of bells, which rang equally joyfully for the butcher’s wedding the other day, and would ring for the home-coming of our successors, if they were good, as you are, for ample pay, you can’t be surprised if I decline to fall in with your views of the matter. Don’t let us discuss this again! I shall never change. I am a Cockney, and to me the pavements, gas, the roar of the town, and the stir and happiness

of life are worth a generation of country sights, sounds, and boredoms. It is only a pity that you did not fall in love with one of the Talbots, they would just have suited you; they adore patronage, while I only care for the society of my kind, of my superiors mentally, and shall never, never care for this dead-alive existence," and Jacinth's eyes flashed ominously, and she drew her hand angrily from Lord William, who, however, laughed kindly at her, and, saying, as usual, that she would soon alter her opinion of the neighbourhood once she had really lived there, jumped quickly out of the carriage when it stopped at the lodge-gate, to interview his factotum, who was standing there, a pleased grin on his bucolic countenance, and a huge bundle of plans under his arm, ready for his master's eyes, and Jacinth drove on into the courtyard, thinking bitterly of the long dull days before her, and scheming already how she could get back to the London which she had only just left. And, indeed, as August and September passed

away, and chill October, his wings laden with mist and rain, and his days weary with storms, came to Fulbrook, Jacinth began to understand what absolute dulness meant.

Lord William had given up trying to make her take interest in the village and in the rapidly increasing Pottery; and, as all Fulbrook was in arms against them, and their appearance in church produced dead cuts on all sides, Jacinth hardly went outside the doors. She would not know the Barford country town folks, and the County, embittered against her husband, would have none of her, even refusing to see the Duchess, who came to stay, and ignored the Duke because he was supposed to favour a scheme which was new, and therefore dangerous, and which acknowledged rights where hitherto there had only been privileges.

The ordinary country squire, brought up on his own acres and among his own tenants, is tyrant from his cradle; often a beneficent and excellent tyrant, but one all the same. The land is his, the game is his, the people

are his ; and although he has to march with the times, or else the times would mentally walk over him and leave him flat on the ground, he does so grudgingly, abusing education and freedom, and panting for the days of high prices, big wars, ample prosperity for himself and the farmer, and abject misery for the great multitude of those who are too poor and too wretched to do anything but exist ; thankful, no doubt, when they end a sordid and desperate life in the grave that is the only atom of land they are ever allowed to own.

The facts that times are bad, that land has gone out of cultivation, and that the agricultural labourer has gone to starve in cities, were, or rather had been, stock arguments in favour of the closing the ports against foreign produce at every agricultural dinner for miles round ; and when Lord William arose with his ideas of what a country squire's life should be, his practical illustration of doing his work and sharing his advantages among those who had nothing,

it was but natural that those who pined for the good old days of selfishness and "no progress" should regard him as someone to be shunned and avoided, as one avoids the loud-mouthed Democrat, whose one idea of Socialism is to rob those who have to give to those who will not work, because he had demonstrated that co-operation was more necessary than "fair trade," and that the England of the future was to consist of more general comfort, and far fewer very rich men, than had ever been contemplated before.

As week succeeded week, the village became settled down; and as work came in for honestly woven linen, fine needlework, and a peculiar art pottery, introduced into London by Lord William's friends, his hands became so full, and work crowded in on him so swiftly, that he had hardly time to be pained by Jacinth's coldness, or hurt by her absolute refusal to aid him in his work; and as more and more money was required, until he really only kept enough in his own hands for bare comfort, her heart hardened against



him more and more, and she began to believe that what she often said was true, and that her husband had forgotten her entirely in his craze after the reclaiming and repopulation of the land.

More than once, stung to desperation at the dulness, Jacinth had made a hasty rush up to London to the Seymours, and had laid in a stock of finery and of odds and ends for the house, and managed to add considerably to her already appalling pile of bills; but Lord William had been so angry with her, and had stated so strongly his opinion of the Seymours, that as Jacinth was penniless and friendless outside her husband's house, she could not avoid obeying him, even when she chafed more and more against the bonds which kept her tied to his side.

And yet, sometimes, her nobler self could not help asserting itself after all. Pine as she did for London, there was nothing unnatural in her husband's desire to live in his own place, and for the good of others. Bob and Barbara lived such a life; but then

Barbara had her children, and Bob the delights of the dear dogs and his literary work ; and as Jacinth recollected the *Wasp*, and what she called her work on that, she thought she saw a way out of some of her difficulties, and began once more her regular correspondence with Francis Seymour, despite the fact that each time the post came, and the bag was opened by her husband, the chances of detection were possible, when she would be sternly forbidden to add her share to the "garbage heap," as Lord William called the Society journals singly and collectively. Though she was secure of safety, as far as the *Wasp* itself was concerned, for her husband never saw—never would even hear of—that smart, lively and most entertaining journal.

One afternoon, however, she was nearly being discovered. Barbara and Bob, Betty and Brian had driven the donkeys over, and were going to stay for a couple of nights, and despite March winds and the prospect of an unbroken round of Fulbrook—as Lord William had vetoed any idea of a flat this

season—Jacinth could not avoid feeling merrier than she had done for some time ; for not only was Bob in better spirits than usual, but it was impossible to be long with Barbara without feeling better for that benign and loving presence. Then, too, were not Betty and Brian more amusing and outspoken than usual ? and had not two lovely setter puppies accompanied them because they were too rare and perfect, and precious, to be left entirely to the tender mercies of a servant ? and were not all four of the juveniles rolling over and over among the rugs and furs which embellished “Aunty Jay’s” favourite sitting-room—the big hall ?

Bob was leaning up against the wide fireplace ; and Barbara, her busy fingers already occupied with a blue sock, was looking up at him ; while Jacinth leant back in her wide chair, shading her eyes from the fire, and laughing at the antics of the children and dogs ; while Lord William, in his shooting jacket and leathers—a business-like costume he adhered to, though the shooting was all

over and done with—was sitting on one of the arms of his wife's chair, with his arm round her shoulders, feeling as if life could give him nothing more precious than such a situation, yet wondering secretly to himself if Betty or Brian, or their counterparts, belonged to him and Jacinth, whether she would not then be entirely reconciled to her home among the Fulbrook hills. But Jacinth had far too often openly displayed her dislike for most children to lead her husband to suppose she longed for any of her own; and Lord William sighed, even as the thought of his happiness filled his heart, and wondered what would happen at Stradfield, if neither he nor the Duke left a son behind them to inherit the title and carry on the good old name.

He would have relapsed into a brown study had not the butler brought in the letter-bag at this moment and handed it to him. Jacinth took it out of his hands and began to look through the contents with the secret hope that at present, at all events, there might be no more bills for her. But several

suspicious looking envelopes greeted her anxious eyes, and in concealing them a couple of newspapers fell to the ground and were eagerly seized by Bob, who had a love for this species of literature, and could not afford even yet to gratify his affection for it.

“Hulloh!” he exclaimed, as Jacinth read the few letters which she could peruse in public; while Lord William, engrossed in his share, hardly noticed anyone else; “here is our old friend the *Wasp*; now for the news!” and throwing himself down on the rug, he laughed over its amusing paragraphs to himself until he came to one of the articles, the wording of which struck him as strangely familiar; it was a description of the keeper’s cottage in Bevercombe wood, and he was just on the point of calling Jacinth’s attention to it, when she lifted her eyes from her letters, and, seeing his occupation, she caught the paper from him, put her finger to her lips with a glance at her husband, and rising from her chair, carried it and the rest of her letters away into her own boudoir, where she locked all in her

desk until she could find time to glance through what she was all too sure would prove to be the materials for an unpleasant afternoon's work. When she returned to the hall, Bob and the children and Lord William had departed and left Barbara and the setter puppies alone. Jacinth stooped down and possessed herself of one of the small, fat balls of fur, and then settled herself once more into her chair.

Barbara glanced at her anxiously, but did not speak for a few moments; she could not help seeing how jaded and bored Jacinth looked, and her heart ached for her. At last she said, "Why conceal the *Wasp*?"

"One of William's fads—his endless fads," she answered, carelessly. "He is not amused by the *Wasp*, *ergo*, no one must be amused by it either; he abhors so-called Society journals, *ergo*, we must abhor them too. Haven't you known William long enough to discover that what he hates most in this world is originality; we must all be made to his pattern, else he will have none of us?"

"I cannot say that I have discovered

anything to his disadvantage at present," said Barbara, smiling; "and I should be inclined to think that if William disapproves of the *Wasp* that you should not take it in. Bob used to hate it, if I remember right."

"He seemed amused enough by it just now," replied Jacinth, irritably; "but no doubt he is like all the rest of the male sex, he abuses these poor papers frightfully, and yet contrives to read every single word in them, and enjoys all the jokes too. Now I am consistent; I not only love every single line, but am honest enough to say so. But men are beyond me; I frankly own I cannot understand them, and I don't think I want to. Ah! Barbara, dull as Bevercombe was, and no doubt is, sometimes I almost wish myself back there planning out a new frock with you, and wondering how it could be managed without robbing Brian and Betty of cake, or jam, or a new pair of boots. After all, when one is poor nothing is expected of one; now rags can't be allowed to Lady William Petersfield, and, in consequence, I am often

rather worse off than I used to be with you."

Barbara laughed merrily. "You look very, very poor and miserable, I must say," she exclaimed. "The fur on your dress could not have cost less than £20.

"Twenty pounds!" said Jacinth. "I only wish I could get sables for £20. These, my dear Barbara, cost over £200; and yet I am not happy. Mrs. Stephenson's cost £400, and she goes about telling everyone they were the proceeds of her book, when all the world knows that it was published on commission by a man who bolted with what it did produce, and that she never received a farthing. I only hope her sables are giving her as much trouble as mine are giving me. I shall be amply revenged if they do."

"What do you mean?" asked Barbara, anxiously.

"I mean that they are not paid for; and, if William goes on as he is going on now that they never will be," said Jacinth, calmly. "I can't tell what there is about you, Barbara,



but one seems impelled to confide in you, whether one wishes to do so or not ; and I feel very much inclined to confess all my troubles to you, and get your clear common sense to bear upon them. How often I wish I could exchange my nature for yours, and have the calm satisfaction out of merely doing my duty that you always have ! Now I have satisfaction in nothing."

"Then you ought to have," remarked Bob, sauntering into the room at this moment ; and catching up the other puppy, he weighed it critically in his hand. "Wasn't that article yours, Jay ? and why mayn't a fellow read it ? It struck me that you were running me close, and that you could get more work on the *Squire*, if you wanted it ; though, why a bloated aristocrat, rolling in riches like you, should want to take the bread out of the mouths of us poor hard-working creatures, who must live by our pens, passes my comprehension. A couple of guineas can't be anything to you."

"Which shows what you know about it,"

said Jacinth. "William's fads take up every sixpence, and he is always begging me to do with less and less, until I am quite convinced we should not have any more to spend than you have at Bevercombe, if I would listen to him ; but I won't. It is bad enough to have to live in such a hole as this—looked down upon as we are, boycotted, set on one side by all the county—without being rendered destitute as well. If I can't have London and London society, at least I'll have as much else as I can ; and, in consequence, instead of doing with less at Windyholme, I want twice as many things as I do in town, because if I didn't buy them myself I should never see anything beyond those sweet bonnets of the Talbots, and old Miss Barker's dreadful check silk, behind which I sit every Sunday, when I go to church, which isn't often, and wonder if anyone could have made those checks meet. I don't believe, however, the genius of Laferrière could have persuaded them to. Ah! don't look shocked, Bob," she added, as she noticed his anxious eyes, and his kind face clouded.

“ You know I am a hopeless case. I always told you I yearned for the world and Society. I am only happy there; here I am miserable.”

“ More shame for you!” said Bob, sternly. “ Do you remember, Jacinth, that when you were engaged, I told you you had happiness in your grasp, and that now all you had to do was to hold it? You are wilfully letting it slip from your hands; and for what? That you may ruin yourself as a Society woman; that you may give better parties and wear finer clothes than anyone else; while before you is spread an opportunity that few women have of making a name that will be handed down to posterity as a benefactor of her country. At all events, if you don't care for such a career, for Heaven's sake don't hamper your husband. He is demonstrating now that the country can be redeemed from the stagnation that had overtaken it; and if he can do that successfully, his bill will pass both Houses, become law, and the land will be reclaimed; our cities will be relieved of the present congested state of the markets;

and we shall see prosperity again amongst us, not for one—not for half-a-dozen of us—but for the whole country. Who, to secure this, would not forego any amount of Society, any number of fine dresses?”

“It never will be secured,” said Jacinth, firmly. “You only listen to William’s schemes. You don’t reflect how often similar communities have been tried before, and one and all failed. I have studied the question, and I am convinced that England is played out. Her death-blow was given her when we opened the ports, and she finally expired when the labourers were emancipated; or, I should say, were allowed to vote. Why, surely you, Bob, you who know the bucolic mind thoroughly, and know, too, how densely imbecile the ordinary agricultural labourer is, can understand why I decline to see all the money I should so enjoy spending, cast away on those who would be far happier left alone, just doing their day’s work and having enough to eat, and no more?”

“You will not see that William is no

visionary, no Socialist," replied Bob, firmly. "He does not wildly give up all he has, to be divided among a gang of lazy fools. He administers his property properly; and, above all, he is winning back to the country all those who were perishing in the dirt of London. Look at Fulbrook now; and then drive with me over the farms round Bevercombe. Don't you recollect Jarvis? how, when he died all the capital he had sunk in the land went into old Squire Wylliams' pocket, and how his wife and daughter had to live in a tiny cottage in the village their bailiff would have despised? Well, all those fields are out of cultivation now. All the cottages are fallen in; and there is hardly a soul left in the village. Squire Wylliams' successor will not sell a yard of the land uncultivated; neither will he cultivate it himself. Lord William's bill will deal with such cases as this. And may I only live to see the day when the land must be cultivated, or pass into the custody of the nation, to be administered for the good of the greatest number. Then

I shall die happy ; proud, indeed, to have been the brother-in-law of a man who was able to carry such a measure through by practically demonstrating to the meanest intellect that the country could yet keep her children by means that we had despised."

"You are hopeless," said Jacinth, shrugging her shoulders ; and going to the door she looked out. "Were I a villager, I would rather die in a back slum in London than live among the desolate heath and bitter chill of Fulbrook. What are you going to do, Barbara ? I have some letters to look at and a little work to do before dinner. It isn't fine enough for a stroll."

"Mayn't I have the *Wasp* again ?" asked Bob. "I want to see your article, for, curiously enough, I took the same subject for the *Squire* this week, and I want to read how you've treated it."

"Oh, yes," replied Jacinth ; "only please keep it in your own room, and don't speak of it before William. He would never forgive me if he knew that not only I took

in the *Wasp*, but that it took me in. He tells me little enough as it is, for fear I should disclose his precious secrets to the Seymours ; he'd tell me nothing at all if he were acquainted with the fact that I write. He is quite rabid on the subject of Society journalism, as I dare say you know ; but it is the only link left between me and civilisation, and I should expire without my papers. So pray don't get me into disgrace by letting the *Wasp* be in evidence."

"I wish you'd do your husband justice," said Bob, with a sigh, and putting his arm round Jacinth's shoulders, he drew her towards him. "If you two could only work together ——"

"The country would be saved," interrupted Jacinth, flippantly, and drawing herself away from her brother, she turned towards the door. "Alas! Bob, that we cannot! but it is impossible for me to alter my nature, and, therefore, let us agree to dismiss this subject. A woman entirely dependent on her husband is in a miserable position ; miserable ! if only papa had behaved himself, what a different existence would mine have been ! However, I won't talk

any more. I must write some letters before the post departs, which it does almost at once, and William is not as accommodating as Rhody Jemimy used to be ; he will catch the mail whether my letters are ready or not ; ” and, so saying, Jacinth ran up the broad oak staircase into her boudoir, where she turned her attention to the most unpleasant heap of letters that awaited her ; while her brother, whistling to his dog, went out into the garden to seek for his brother-in-law.

He found Lord William with Betty and Brian eagerly discussing the merits of the new see-saw just put up in the playground of the village school, on the very site of the proposed new stables and coach-house, and, bundling off those two young persons to their mother, with strict injunctions to Betty to see that the little puppies were fed, he put his arm through Lord William’s and proposed that they should climb the hill beyond the house, and get a good wide view of the sea.

“ I can never have too much of the sea,” he said cheerily, “ and let us get up through



the pine-trees and see more than we can in this tiny bay of yours ; besides, I want to talk to you, and we can talk better out here ; somehow walls always stifle me. How men exist in London I have yet to discover ? ”

“ I can’t think how you come to be Jacinth’s brother,” exclaimed Lord William.

“ And yet she must love the country at heart,” said Bob, laughing. “ Now, William ! I am going to break faith on promise of secrecy ; but things aren’t right between you two, and I want to have a finger in the pie. I dare say I shan’t be thanked, and you’ll both turn and rend me ; but I can’t see you two drift apart and not do my level best to stop the matter before it has got too far. Are you sure you understand Jacinth, and are you sure you understand what she really means ? She is a creature of moods.”

“ Better not ask too much,” interrupted Lord William. “ Bob, old fellow, where does all the selfishness come from ? She won’t listen to a word I have to say, won’t give up a thing for me ; and her only ambitions are

too contemptible for me to speak of them, and yet I am so fond of her that I let her have her way when I ought not. Then you can have no conception of how she made money fly in town. I say nothing about it, but the crash must come, for I know how she is involved. I mean to teach her a lesson she will not forget, and perhaps after that we may have peace. Nothing shall stand between me and the salvation of the people. We have no children, and so I shall not consider the future except to find and train my successor, for I mean my village to succeed, and my bill to pass. That once done, Jacinth will work with me, for she will see then that even the Fulbrook worthies' boycott will come to an end, and they will be obliged to acknowledge that I am right and they are wrong. Look there, Bob! there's one of my schemes ;" and he pointed across the sea to a fleet of brown-winged fisher boats gliding out into the open, from the end of the range of the Fulbrook hills. "Even with the railway carriage off, our fish pays well. It sells splendidly

in town, for we've ignored the fish-ring and supply direct. My mother has taken the matter up, and she and a committee of ladies are doing wonders with direct food supply. It's better than Regent Street here, Bob ;" and Lord William drew in a deep breath of the fresh air from the sea, and pointed to the view before him, which was indeed a magnificent one ; while the sea rolled sadly on the stones below their feet, and a solitary sea-gull flapped slowly along, uttering its weird cry every now and then. As far as the eye could reach the sea stretched before them, dully grey under the grey March sky, but flecked here and there with a tiny white-headed wave, which hurried along towards the shore, as if eager to cast itself there, and have done with the unceasing tossing to and fro. Away to the right lay the long, grey, grim island of Portland, while on the left the tiny fishing fleet was making its way out to the offing, the brown sails catching the reflection of the sparse rays of the sunset, which was just splitting and gashing the dense

mass of gray mist-like clouds as with a gory knife ; while inland the trees were showing that dim mysterious change of hue from the dense black of winter to the brighter dark brown of early spring, which denotes to the initiated that the life-blood is beginning to stir, and that soon, very soon, the spell of winter will be broken, and the thousand and one charms of a Dorset spring were on their way to enliven the land.

Lord William took off his hat and turned to Bob, his eyes beaming, his heart beating quickly. "Bob, old fellow, I know all you would say, but don't, don't say it now ; let the bill pass, let the land be free from the clutches of such weak things as the Talbots and Verulams, who will neither cultivate it themselves nor let others do so, and you shall tell me anything you like. In the meantime I understand Jacinth. I am watching her, although she thinks I am not. I know, yes, even about the *Wasp*, though I pretend not to for the sake of peace and quiet, and because I won't be worried

until my head is clear, and my people are saved. But I mean her to love me, and fall in with all my plans, and I mean her to learn and love Fulbrook. I come up here sometimes," he added, gently, "and I look down upon Windyholme lying safely in the hollow there, and I think of the time when she shall climb up here with me and see the village clustering round our home, and shall confess that I was right. I may seem cruel now to my darling, but I know Fulbrook and the spell she casts over her children, and I know Jacinth feels it even now, when she thinks she is eating her heart out with dulness, for what you were going to show me in that wretched paper proves it. She thinks I don't know she writes, but she is too careless with her properties, and I should know her touch anywhere in the *Wasp*, and then I am comforted. I won't think of her extravagancies, if I can help it, and will only look upon them as childish foolishness; for I know she'll learn a lesson from the way she is being badgered by the harpies, to whom I have

written to say that I will not be responsible for anything she doesn't pay for; and, though I know I shall have to pay up and start her fresh, I shall carefully deduct all I pay now from her future allowance, and I shall not pay at all until she comes to me and makes a full confession of her foolishness."

"Do you think she will do this?" asked Bob, anxiously, looking down at Windyholme, where the bright lights were already beginning to shine in the different rooms, and noticing that a particularly dazzling amount of light seemed to stream from the window of Jacinth's room. "She is firmly convinced that open confession means open disgrace; for you once let fall some remarks about that row in the Guilders' family, which she has taken home; and she firmly believes you'd contest the price of every article in court rather than pay the harpies."

"Has she talked the matter over with you?" said Lord William, sharply.

"Not exactly," replied Bob. "I am only quoting what she has said before you over

and over again. But I know Jacinth. Don't let her become desperate over these wretched bills, or she'll do something foolish."

"What can she do?" asked Lord William. "It is difficult to get into mischief in Fulbrook, even were she inclined to do so, which she isn't. No, Bob, I must not relieve her mind, nor the minds of her shopkeepers, too soon, or I shall have my work all over again. Leave her to me. I know her even better than you do, and her heart's in the right place; but she has to learn her lesson, and I don't want to teach her twice. In time she will understand the position and enjoy it, and then she will appreciate me: which sounds conceited; but you know I am not that."

"I know, I know," replied Bob, still anxiously; "but, William, forgive me if I bore you; but ——"

"No; no more, old fellow," interrupted Lord William. "It is almost dinner time—quite time to dress for dinner—and, what's more, I want a romp with the babies before that. Sometimes I wish we had your

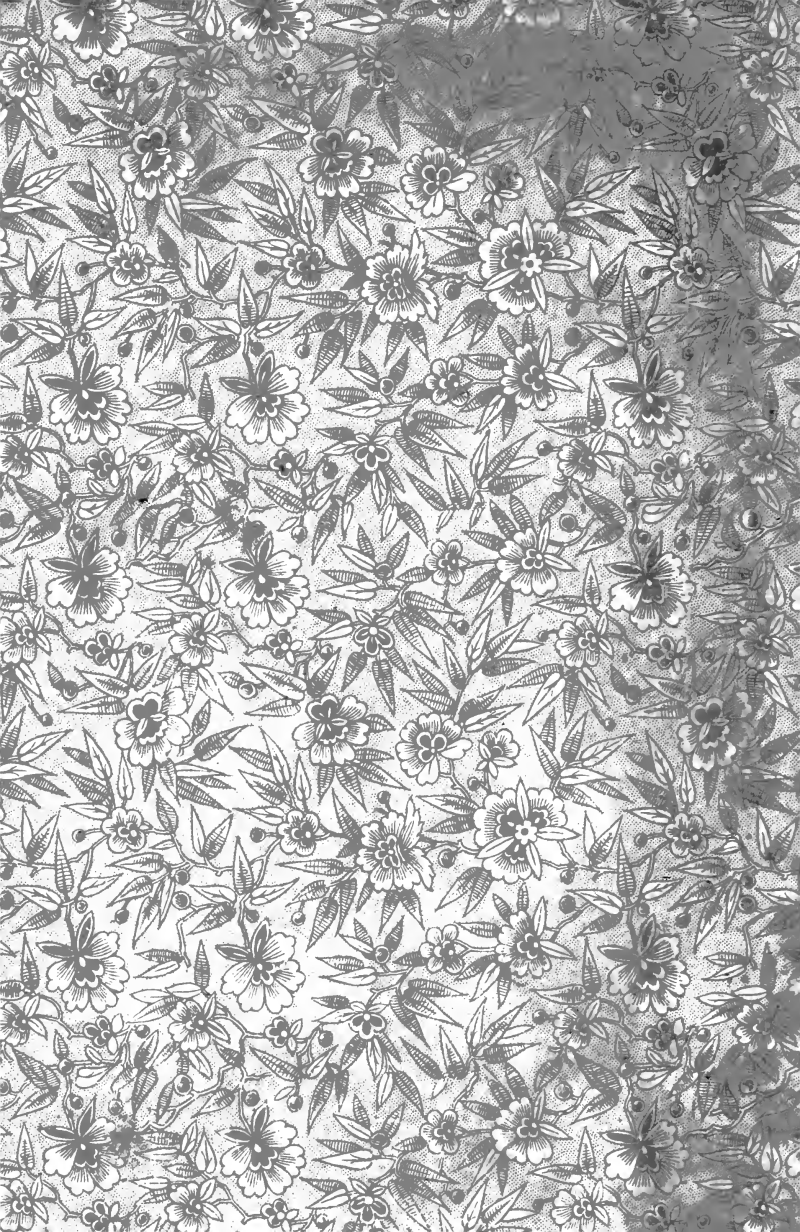
encumbrances, Bob ; but then I think I shouldn't have a right to devote myself to the village if I had, and how should I bear that? Ah! there's the gong," he added, as the sombre roll reached them from the open hall door ; " we must hurry down, for James remembers, even if I forget sometimes, how much depends on regularity. It's Saturday, too, and the village concert, and I have to sing. You have not heard our band, either."

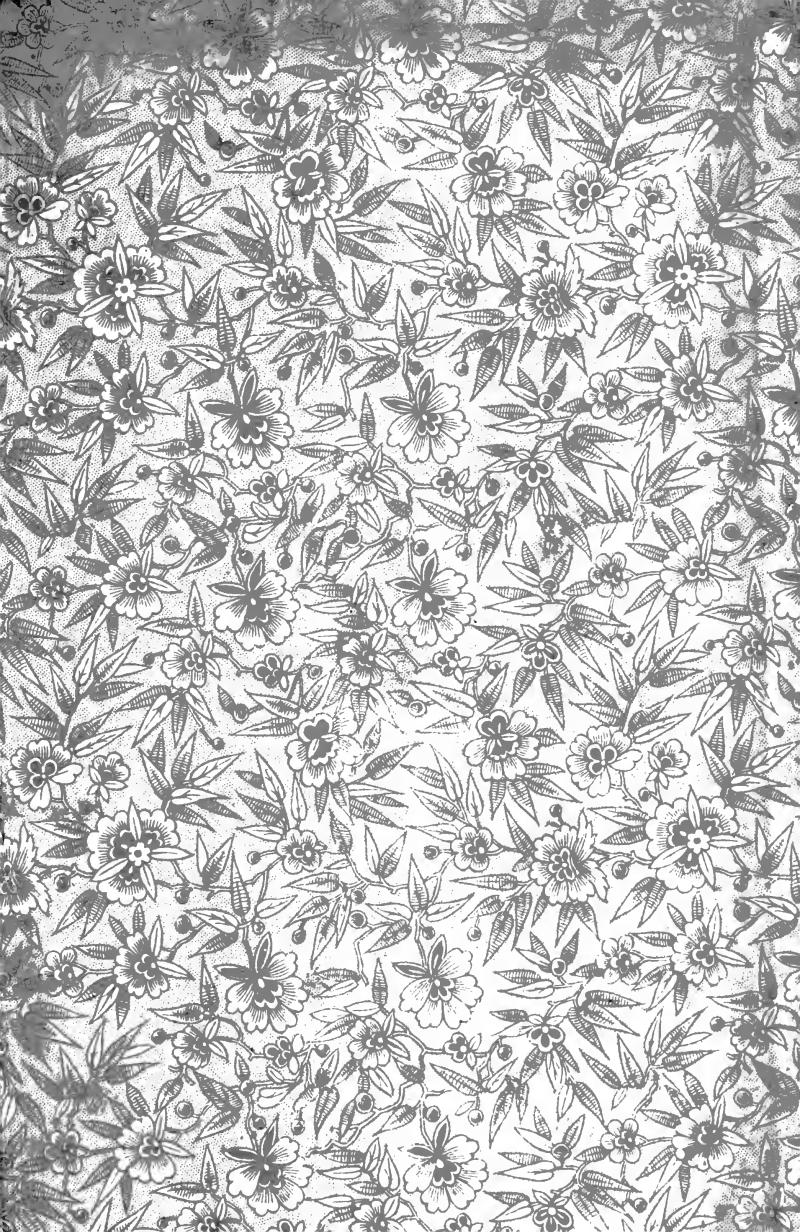
And talking about the village, and the village only, the brothers-in-law ran down the slippery pine-needle strewn path to the house, where Bob sought Barbara, with a sigh, and spent his dressing-hour talking to her about the most unsatisfactory state of things between the husband and wife, refusing to accept her gentle words of comfort ; and becoming melancholy, indeed, as he remembered Jacinth's impetuous nature, and her intolerance of anything like interference with herself and her concerns.

END OF VOL. II.









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